

**STAFF REPORT**  
**HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION**

**FILE NO.:** HL14-212, 3161 Olsen Drive (Century 21 Theater)

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

HL14-212. Historic Landmarks Commission-initiated designation of the “Century 21 Theater” as a landmark of special historical, architectural, cultural, aesthetic or engineering interest or value of an historic nature.

<b>Existing Zoning</b>	CG – Commercial General
<b>General Plan</b>	Neighborhood/Community Commercial & Urban Village
<b>Council District</b>	1
<b>Annexation Date</b>	December 17, 1980
<b>Historic Classification</b>	N/A
<b>Historic Area</b>	N/A

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**BACKGROUND**

On January 9, 2014, the Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) nominated the Century 21 Theater (3161 Olsen Drive) as a City Landmark. This nomination initiated proceedings for the formal designation of the theater as a City Landmark pending further historic analysis and public hearings before the Historic Landmarks Commission and the City Council.

A Special Use Permit (SP13-044) has been filed to allow the demolition of all three of the theater buildings. As of this date, no development permits are pending to allow new development on the site. The addition of the building to the City’s Historic Resources Inventory as a City Landmark would establish the requirement for the issuance of Historic Preservation (HP) permits for City approval of the demolition or any exterior changes to the building. Whether the building is ultimately preserved will be subject to further evaluation in conjunction with the review of any future development proposal.



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<sup>1</sup> Figure 1. Century 21 (Photo Credit: <http://mobile.theverge.com/2014/4/21/5628202/sunset-on-the-domes>)



## Century 21 Theater

The Century 21 Theater was constructed in 1964 and is the oldest and most intact of three theater buildings (Century 21 (1964), Century 22 (1966) & Century 23 (1968)) that occupy an approximately 10-acre theater complex. The theater complex is located on both sides of Olsen Drive, adjacent to the Winchester Mystery House. The theaters closed on March 30, 2014.

The approximately 1000-seat, single-screen theater is a freestanding concrete block and steel-framed dome of a mid-century modern and futuristic style. The theater was the first of six similar theaters designed by Architect Vincent G. Raney in San José during the period of 1964 to 1971. It was the last single-screen dome theater in San Jose, as the others were split into multiple screens or converted to other uses. According to the Staff Report (Attachment B) prepared by State Historian Amy H. Crain, *“the Century 21 Theater in San Jose joins the locally landmarked Cinerama Dome in Hollywood as one of the best surviving examples of the freestanding dome type theater remaining in California.”* (Refer to National Register Registration Form, Attachment C, for additional details

on the theater).

### **National Register of Historic Places**

This proposed City Landmark nomination follows the decision made by the State Historical Resources Commission on April 22, 2014 that the theater is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service and is the federal government's official list of districts, sites, and buildings deemed worthy of preservation. The National Park service will take final action within 45-days of receiving the State's recommendation.

As indicated in the Staff Report (Attachment B), the Office of Historic Preservation supported the proposed listing, describing the Century 21 Theater as: *"Virtually unaltered on its exterior, the Century 21 Theater embodies the distinctive characteristics of the mid-century modernist style and suburban roadside architecture popular during the 1960s."*

All National Register properties are automatically included in the California Register of Historical Resources. Registration or eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places does not by itself place any restrictions on the use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property; however, all National Register properties are automatically included in the California Register of Historic Resources. The California Register is intended to encourage public recognition and protection of resources of architectural, historical, archeological and cultural significance.

In addition, buildings listed in the California Register of Historical Resources are considered as historical resources under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and, therefore, any project that results in a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource (including demolition) may have a significant effect on the environment and will require an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to evaluate the proposed project.

### **Referral of the National Register Listing to the City of San Jose**

The National Register listing was referred to the Historic Landmarks Commission on March 11, 2014 and to the City Council on March 18, 2014 for their review and comments. Both the Historic Landmarks Commission and the City Council received extensive public testimony regarding the proposed National Register listing.

In general, those in support of the preservation of the theater, including residents from the adjoining neighborhood and historic preservation advocates and organizations expressed that the building should be preserved because it is the last of its kind and one of the most iconic buildings in West San José. They encouraged preserving the theater so that it could be updated or repurposed in conjunction with the future development of the site. Many spoke of the sentimental value of the Century Theaters as a primary destination for moviegoers in San José for many years.

Those in opposition to the proposed National Register listing, including the property owners, indicated that the theater served its practical purpose and is obsolete, and that its refurbishment or rehabilitation would be too costly. The City's comments were forwarded in the attached letter (Attachment D) from Mayor Chuck Reed to the State Historic Preservation Officer dated April 7, 2014. In addition, the City Council gave staff direction to proceed with City Landmark designation

process based on an analysis of the historic research conducted as part of the National Register application process in lieu of the submittal of application materials.

## **ANALYSIS**

The Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement commissioned Archives & Architecture, LLC, to complete an independent, third party analysis of the National Register nomination material (Attachment E). After reviewing the materials and considering other relevant information, the report concluded that the Century 21 Theater was eligible for listing on the National Register as an early and notable example of a Cinerama-type theater designed by noted Bay Area architect Vincent G. Raney. In addition, the report evaluated the theater site for suitability as a City Landmark under City of San José Municipal Code Section 13.48.110 (procedures for designation of a landmark).

The evaluation found that the property qualifies for City Landmark status based on its special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value to the community, as well as for the distinctive design of the building, which is: *“an extremely fine example of Mid-century Modern architecture, and is representative of important local emerging social, arts and entertainment culture in San José during its period of industrialization and Suburbanization.”*

## **Historic Landmark Criteria**

Title 13 of the Municipal Code specifies that prior to recommending approval of a proposed designation as a City Landmark, the Historic Landmarks Commission shall find that said proposed landmark has special historical, architectural, cultural, aesthetic, or engineering interest or value of an historical nature, and that its designation as a landmark conforms with the goals and policies of the General Plan.

Primarily based on an analysis of the information provided in the historical evaluation prepared by Archives & Architecture and the Application for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, it is staff's determination that the findings can be made that the Century 21 Theater has special historical, architectural, cultural, aesthetic, or engineering interest or value of an historical nature. The Municipal Code specifies that the HLC may consider the following factors, among other relevant factors, with respect to the proposed landmark:

1. Its character, interest or value as part of the local, regional, state or national history, heritage or culture;

*Century 21 has character, interest and value as a part of local and regional history and heritage and culture, and is a distinctive building within the Valley Fair/Santana Row area and West San José.*

2. Its location as a site of a significant historic event;

Not Applicable

3. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the local, regional, state or national culture and history;

Not Applicable

4. Its exemplification of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the city of San José;

*With the dominance as the automobile, and as a freestanding Theater, the Century 21 Theater represents the evolution from downtown movie Theaters of the pre-World War II era to the retail center and multiplex cinemas of the post World War II era.*

*The structure exemplifies aspects of the social and cultural heritage of San José within the theme of Social, Arts, and Recreation as a significant building that is recognizable within the context of the City as a whole as the first building of a new era of wide-screen cinema in San José.*

5. Its portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style;

*The Century 21 Theater serves as a snap shot in time, embodying the 1960s-era popular culture with its Space Age design and flying saucer shape. The design of the building speaks to the fascination that Americans had with technology and space exploration. The structure has not been significantly altered since its construction and retains its original massing and materials, as well as the features that reflect its historic function, technologies, and aesthetics.*

6. Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen;

*The building's shape and "Space-Age-inspired" architecture is distinctive and an increasingly rare building type. Unlike the other dome Theaters on the site (Century 22 and 23), the Century 21 Theater was never split into smaller auditoriums, retaining its original design intended to display widescreen films*

7. Its identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city of San José;

*Architect Vincent G. Raney designed a number of buildings throughout the country but is not considered influential to the City of San Jose specifically.*

8. Its embodiment of elements of architectural or engineering design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represents a significant architectural innovation or which is unique.

*The Century 21 Theater portrays an era of modern architectural history that is embodied in the building's mid-century Modern architectural style and unique space age dome design.*

## **GENERAL PLAN CONFORMANCE**

The proposed City Landmark designation conforms with the Envision San José 2040 General Plan goals and policies that aim to preserve and enhance historic landmarks and districts in order to promote a greater sense of historic awareness, community identity and contribute toward a sense of place. In addition, the following policies address the designation and treatment of City Landmarks:

- *Land Use Policy – 13 .3: For landmark Structures located within new development areas, incorporate the landmark structures within the new development as a means to create a sense of place, contribute to a vibrant economy, provide a connection to the past, and make more attractive employment, shopping, and residential areas.*
- *Land Use Policy – 13.13: Foster the rehabilitation of buildings, structures, areas, places, and districts of historic significance. Utilize incentives permitting flexibility as to their uses; transfer of development rights; tax relief for designated landmarks and districts; easements; alternative building code provisions for the reuse of historic structure; and financial incentives.*



## CEQA

The environmental impacts of the project will not have an unacceptable negative effect on adjacent property or properties in that the project has been determined exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) per Section 15331. The project is limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The proposed Landmark nomination was initiated by the Historic Landmarks Commission at a public hearing on January 9, 2014. Both the Historic Landmarks Commission and the City Council received extensive public testimony regarding the proposed National Register listing. A public hearing notice for the project was published in a local newspaper, and a notice of this Historic Landmarks Commission public hearing was mailed to the owners and tenants of all properties located within 1,000 feet of the project site. Information about the proposed projects and the associated public hearings has been made available through the Planning Division website, and staff has been available to answer questions.

## RECOMMENDATION

### HL14-212 – Landmark Designation

Planning Staff recommends that the Commission, after holding a public hearing on the subject proposal, recommend that the City Council approve the proposed Landmark Designation of the Century 21 Theater as Historical Landmark No. 212 at the City Council hearing scheduled for May 20, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.

**Project Manager:** Richard Buikema

**Approved by:** 

**Date:** 4.30.14

### Attachments:

- A. Location and Zoning Map (Figure 2, Page 7)
- B. Staff Report from State historian, Amy H Crain, dated 04/14/14
- C. State Department of Parks & Recreation Landmark Letter and Nomination Materials, dated 02/12/14
- D. Response Letter from Mayor Chuck Reed to State Department of Parks & Recreation, dated 04/07/14
- E. Historic Analysis from Franklin Maggi, Archives & Architecture, dated 03/03/14
- F. Letter from Property Owner to Mayor and City Council
- G. Emails/Correspondence from Public, dated 04/09/14, 04/22/14, and 04/24/14

## ATTACHMENT A

### LOCATION AND ZONING MAP

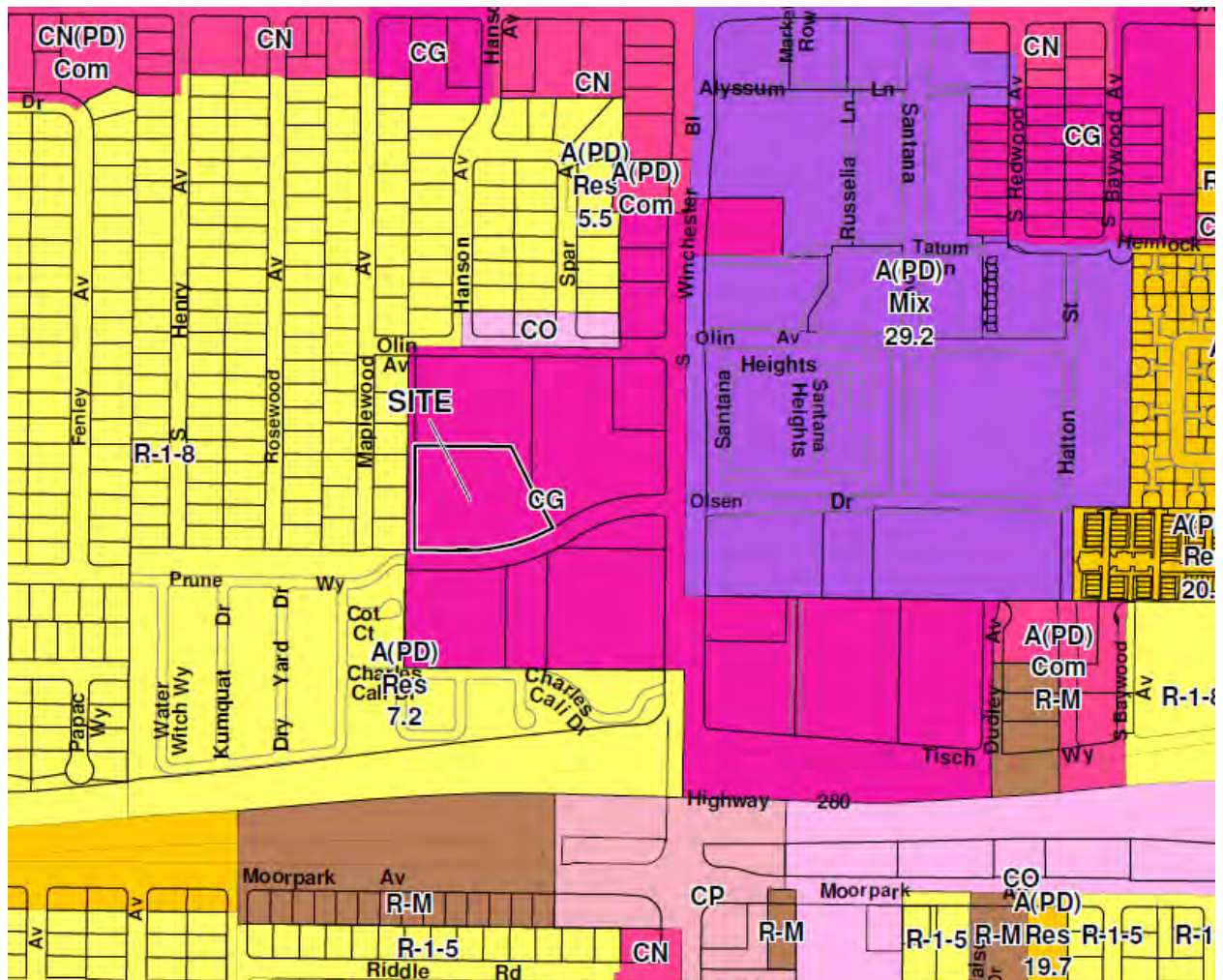


Figure 2. Zoning and project site



# Attachment B

## Century 21 Theater San Jose, Santa Clara County Staff Report

The Century 21 Theater occupies a 2.44-acre parcel located near the intersection of Interstate 280 and Winchester Boulevard in San José, California. The theater is a one-story, concrete block, steel-frame, domed building containing an auditorium, lobby/concession area, restrooms, projection rooms, and storage. The shingled dome is parasol-shaped, with scalloped eaves, and it terminates at the top with an antenna-like steel finial. The primary façade faces east and consists of a projecting arcade composed of square piers supporting a painted plywood canopy embellished with zig-zag detailing. The canopy is surmounted by a plain stucco parapet, in front of which is a neon sign reading: "Century 21." The primary entrance is located at the center of the primary façade; it is composed of four pairs of glazed aluminum doors surmounted by transoms. The ticket sales area is located to the right of the main entrance and an aluminum-frame window wall is to the left. Concrete block wing walls extend beyond the main entry area to the left and to the right, enclosing the lobby. The wing walls are embellished with decorative detailing in the form of alternating projecting half-blocks arranged in a grid pattern. The Century 21 Theater is surrounded by mature landscaping consisting of palm trees, pepper trees, and other ornamental plantings. The property retains integrity.

The theater is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C at the local level as an early and notable example of a Cinerama-type theater designed by noted Bay Area architect Vincent G. Raney. The period of significance is 1964, the year that the building was completed. Virtually unaltered on its exterior, the Century 21 Theater embodies the distinctive characteristics of the mid-century modernist style and suburban roadside architecture popular during the 1960s. It is one of the best-known modernist landmarks in San José, a city that grew from a small agricultural community during the postwar period into America's tenth largest city and the center of high technology for the world. The Century 21 Theater represents a period of optimism and prosperity in a fast-growing city. Cinerama is the name for a patented widescreen projection system that uses three synchronized 35 mm projectors to project images on a curved screen extending 164 degrees. In the United States there are only two theaters currently equipped to show films in Cinerama, the precursor to the wide-screen IMAX projection system of fifty years later. Later, the process was refined so that the Cinerama films could be exhibited with a single-lens projector. The Century 21 Theater in San José joins the locally landmarked Cinerama Dome in Hollywood as one of the best surviving examples of the freestanding dome type theater remaining in California.

The property is nominated by the Northern California Chapter of the nonprofit organization DOcumentation and COnservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the MODern MOVement (DOCOMOMO/NOCA). A letter of objection is on file from the owner Winchester Investments, LLC, represented by Ray K. Farris, II. Additional copies of the letter were received with approximately 40 signatures representing individuals and trusts that comprise the LLC. National Register staff confirmed that for purposes of notice and owner objection, corporations are considered a single owner. One additional letter of objection and seventy-five letters of support have been received to date. In its role as representative of a Certified Local Government, the San Jose Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) reviewed the nomination at its regular meeting March 11, 2014, and forwarded comments to the Mayor and City Council. A copy of the HLC memo was included with the letter of support from the Preservation Action Council of San Jose. At their regular meeting March 18, 2014 the City Council considered a letter drafted by the mayor in objection to the nomination. Following discussion, the council voted 7 to 4 against the nomination. The Mayor's letter was received April 7, 2014 with the memo from the Historic Landmarks Commission.

OHP staff supports the nomination and recommends the State Historical Resources Commission determine the Century 21 Theater meets National Register Criterion C at the local level with a 1964 period of significance. Staff recommends the State Historic Preservation Officer approve the nomination for forwarding to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register.

Amy H. Crain  
State Historian II  
April 14, 2014



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Century 21 Theater

Other names/site number: Winchester Theater 21

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 3161 Olsen Drive

City or town: San José State: California County: Santa Clara

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	
<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ Title :</p>	<p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater



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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete block, steel, plywood, and stucco

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

### Summary Paragraph

The Century 21 Theater occupies a 2.44-acre parcel located near the intersection of Interstate 280 and Winchester Boulevard in San José, California. The parcel is part of a larger 11.6-acre site comprising an asphalt-paved surface parking lot with four buildings on it: Century 21 Theater, Century 22 Theater, Century 23 Theater, and Flames Coffee Shop. This nomination is only for the Century 21 Theater, the oldest and most intact of the theaters. The Century 21 Theater is a one-story, concrete block, steel-frame, domed building containing an auditorium, lobby/concession area, restrooms, projection rooms, and storage. The shingled dome is parasol-shaped, with scalloped eaves, and it terminates at the top with an antenna-like steel finial. The primary façade faces east and consists of a projecting arcade composed of square piers supporting a painted plywood canopy embellished with zig-zag detailing. The canopy is surmounted by a plain stucco parapet, in front of which is a neon sign reading: "Century 21." The primary entrance is located at the center of the primary façade; it is composed of four pairs of glazed aluminum doors surmounted by transoms. The ticket sales area is located to the right of the main entrance and an aluminum-frame window wall is to the left. Concrete block wing walls extend beyond the main entry area to the left and to the right, enclosing the lobby. The wing walls are embellished with decorative detailing in the form of alternating projecting half-blocks arranged in a grid pattern. The Century 21 Theater is surrounded by mature landscaping consisting of palm trees, pepper trees, and other ornamental plantings. The property retains integrity from its 1964 period of significance.

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## Narrative Description

### Site

Located on the north side of Olsen Drive, just west of S. Winchester Boulevard, the parcel is level and paved in asphalt. The area surrounding the theater has several planting beds containing trees, shrubs, and ground cover, including palms, juniper, and various mature deciduous trees. Mechanical equipment and a loading dock are screened behind fencing along the west side of the building. The greater part of the larger 11.6-acre property, not included in this nomination, is devoted to surface parking. The Century 22 Theater (built 1966, enlarged after 1975) is located north of the Century 21 Theater and separated from it by a driveway. The Century 23 Theater (built 1968) is located south of the Century 21 Theater, on the opposite side of Olsen Drive. A large neon and backlit sign is located at the entrance to the property, at the intersection of Olsen Drive and S. Winchester Boulevard. The Winchester Mystery House is located to the southeast of the Winchester Theater complex. Flames Coffee Shop, originally built as a Bob's Big Boy restaurant, is located at the northeast corner of the larger property, and Santana Row, a regional shopping center is located on the east side of S. Winchester Boulevard. Several housing tracts and a 1960s trailer park bound the site to the north and to the west.

### Exterior

Because the building is circular in plan, the Century 21 Theater does not have traditional conventional façades oriented toward the four cardinal points of the compass. The primary entrance and ticket sales office are housed within a pavilion that faces east toward the parking lot. This pavilion is three bays wide and sheltered beneath a painted plywood canopy that cantilevers out over the sidewalk. The canopy fascia is ornamented with a wood zig-zag design consisting of a repeating pylon shape enclosing painted, plywood shield motifs. The shields are illuminated at night by recessed lighting fixtures. A neon sign spelling "Century 21" is mounted on the roof of the canopy. The underside of the canopy is illuminated by plastic dome-light fixtures. Behind the sign is a curved parapet wall finished in stucco. This element, which articulates the projection room inside the building, is an example of the modernist principle of form following function. The later Century dome theaters on the site do not share this feature.

The left bay of the entry pavilion contains an anodized aluminum storefront consisting of four glazed panels. The center bay contains the primary entrance, which consists of four anodized aluminum, double-leaf doors surmounted by rectangular, inoperable transoms. The right bay of the entry pavilion consists of a pair of glazed anodized aluminum storefronts and the ticket sales kiosk, sheltered beneath a smaller canopy supported by steel pipe columns. The kiosk is paneled in non-historic stone tile. It retains its original ticket sales windows and the back-lit metal sign that displays the names and the times of the movies being shown. To the right of the ticket sales kiosk is the beginning of the decorative concrete block wing wall that extends partway around the north and south sides of the theater. The concrete block wall features a decorative pattern consisting of alternating half-block sections embedded crosswise into the standard stacked bond masonry.

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The decorative concrete block walls enclose the lobby and concession area, returning to the main building approximately one-third of the way around the north and south sides of the building. The rest of the exterior is constructed of standard concrete block laid in stacked bond. More utilitarian than the entry pavilion, the rear two-thirds of the Century 21 Theater is in large part defined by the curved steel ribs that support the domed roof. The ribs create regular structural bays along the lower portion of the walls. Several of these bays contain emergency exits, which each contain pairs of steel hollow-core doors without exterior hardware, presumably to prevent access by non-paying customers. Security cameras and HVAC equipment are located in several of the bays. Two of the rear (west) bays are enclosed behind fencing.

The domed roof of the Century 21 Theater constitutes the majority of the exterior surface area of the building. Defined by the steel ribs that support it, the roof is divided into 20 equal wedge-shaped segments. The lower edge of each wedge is scalloped, recalling the appearance of a mid-century parasol or a merry-go-round. The roof was originally clad in two-toned asphalt/composition shingles. The light shingles paired against a background of darker shingles formed a large starburst pattern at the center of the dome. The roof is now clad in asphalt/composition shingles of a consistent medium gray color. Crowning the top of the roof is a circular parapet that conceals roof-top ventilators. At the center of the circular parapet is a steel finial that resembles a UFO antenna or perhaps the turned wood finials of the nearby Winchester Mystery House.

### **Interior**

The interior of the Century 21 Theater is very simple, consisting of a lobby/concession area at the front (east) side of the building and a large, approximately 1,000-seat auditorium to the rear (west). The lobby is flanked to either side by restrooms: the men's room to the north and the women's room to the south. Gently sloped ramps, also located at the north and south sides of the lobby, provide access to the auditorium.<sup>1</sup> At the rear (west) side of the building are several mechanical, storage, and loading areas. These spaces are all utilitarian in character.

The lobby/concession area was remodeled in 1997. As part of this work, the flooring, wall finishes, and ceilings were replaced with standard off-the-shelf materials available at that time, including carpeting and tile, stone tile wall cladding, glass block detailing, dropped acoustical tile ceilings, and new cabinetry. The lobby/concession area does retain its original layout. The restrooms were also remodeled in 1997.

<sup>1</sup> It is not known precisely how many seats are located in the Century 21 Theater. When the theater originally opened it contained 950 seats. After the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, portions of several rows of seating were removed to accommodate wheelchairs. Since then all of the seats were replaced. Contemporary theater seats are larger than what were originally used in the 1950s and 1960s on account of the expanding girth of the average American. Sources familiar with the theater say that the management increased the number of seats by infilling the area between the seats and the screen.



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Aside from the seating and the carpeting, the interior of the auditorium remains unchanged. The auditorium is very simple, consisting of several concrete tiers divided by metal pipe railings. The tiers are linked by short flights of carpeted stairs illuminated by colored lights. The tiers are terraced, and each terrace is lined by a row of seats. The seats are upholstered in a turquoise color to match the fabric soundproofing that drapes the walls and the lower portion of the dome. Similar to the exterior, the interior of the auditorium is divided into 20 wedge-shaped segments by steel ribs. These ribs meet at a single point at the center of the dome. The area between the ribs is covered in turquoise-colored acoustical tiles which match the soundproofing fabric on the walls. Recessed incandescent lights and ventilators punctuate the dome in a regular pattern. The projection room is located at the east side of the auditorium; its location is indicated by two pairs of glazed openings. Audio speakers are suspended from the ceiling near the projection booths. The west wall of the auditorium is dominated by the large projection screen, which is curved to match the profile of the dome. The lower portion of the north and south walls are punctuated by pairs of steel exit doors that lead outside.

#### **Alterations**

There are very few alteration permits on file for the Century 21 Theater property, in part because the subject property was not annexed by San José until 1980. In 1997, the property owner applied for a permit to complete a full Americans with Disabilities Act upgrade of the toilet rooms and install a new snack bar. At some point the roof of the dome, which originally featured a decorative starburst pattern, was re-shingled using gray asphalt shingles of a uniform color. This change was probably made in 1997. The carpeting and the seating within the auditorium was replaced circa 1997 as well.

#### **Integrity**

The Century 21 Theater retains all aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **Location**

The Century 21 Theater has never been moved. The property retains integrity of location.

#### **Design**

Aside from the lobby/concession area finishes and the starburst shingle pattern on the dome's exterior, the Century 21 Theater has undergone few changes to its original design. The building still retains its original massing and materials and the features that reflect its historic function, technologies, and aesthetics. The property retains integrity of design.

#### **Setting**

Aside from its landscaping having matured, the immediate setting of the Century 21 Theater has not changed since 1964. Designed as the first component of a larger multiplex of freestanding domed theaters, the Century 21 Theater was joined by the Century 22 Theater in

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1966 (with post-1975 additions) and the Century 23 Theater in 1968. The rest of the site has remained in use as a surface parking lot serving the theaters and the nearby Flames Coffee Shop. The property retains integrity of setting.

### ***Materials***

Aside from the 1990s-era finish materials in the lobby, the vast majority of the original materials used to construct the Century 21 Theater and finish are still present and in good condition. The exterior of the dome has been re-shingled at least once, and the materials used are in-kind with what was originally used. Nearly everything else, including the concrete block and wood-frame and stucco walls, anodized aluminum storefronts and doors, plywood detailing, fabric-covered auditorium walls, and acoustic tile ceilings survive intact. The property retains integrity of materials.

### ***Workmanship***

Though made primarily of mass-produced materials widely available during the postwar era, the Century 21 Theater does display some elements of handicraft and skilled workmanship, including the decorative concrete block exterior walls, the carefully welded and custom shaped dome ribs, and the custom-fabricated finial atop the dome. These examples of workmanship illustrate the aesthetic and technological values of the postwar/mid-century period, where faith in technology and the future conveyed a sense of optimism and playfulness. The property retains integrity of workmanship.

### ***Feeling***

Precisely because it retains so many of its original materials, design features, and setting, the Century 21 Theater is a physical embodiment of 1960s-era popular culture, when the car was king and movie-going a top national pastime. The Space Age design of the theater, which resembles a geodesic dome or perhaps even a flying saucer, speaks to the fascination that ordinary Americans had with the future, including high technology and space exploration. In addition to the flying saucer motif, the shingled roof of the Century 21 Theater originally bore the outline of a starburst, which along with Sputniks, amoebas, and various other motifs was a popular symbol of the time. The Century 21 Theater retains integrity of feeling.

### ***Association***

The Century 21 Theater retains its association with its period in time in American history.

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### 8. Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

#### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1964

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1964

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Raney, Vincent G.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Century 21 Theater is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C at the local level as an early and notable example of a Cinerama-type theater designed by noted Bay Area architect Vincent G. Raney. The period of significance is 1964, the year that the building was completed. Virtually unaltered on its exterior, the Century 21 Theater embodies the distinctive characteristics of the mid-century modernist style and suburban roadside architecture popular during the 1960s. It is one of the best-known modernist landmarks in San José, a city that grew from a small agricultural community during the postwar period into America's tenth largest city and the center of high technology for the world. The Century 21 Theater represents a period of optimism and prosperity in a fast-growing city. Cinerama is the name for a patented widescreen projection system that uses three synchronized 35 mm projectors to project images on a curved screen extending 164 degrees. In the United States there are only two theaters currently equipped to show films in Cinerama, the precursor to the wide-screen IMAX projection system of fifty years later. Later, the process was refined so that the Cinerama films could be exhibited with a single-lens projector. The Century 21 Theater in San José joins the locally landmarked Cinerama Dome in Hollywood as one of the best surviving examples of the freestanding dome type theater remaining in California.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Historic Context: San José: 1945-1970**

At the end of World War II, San José had been transformed from a rural backwater of apricot and cherry orchards into a fast-urbanizing high-tech region. New defense, aviation, and high technology plants had sprung up all over the valley, and housing tracts began creeping into the orchards and foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range. The booming industrial sector – with its concomitant growth in suburban housing development – nurtured an expansionist climate in local city government. During the postwar era, San José's city government began its first large-scale planning projects, culminating in 1948 with City Manager O.W. Campbell's *Six-Year Capital Improvement Plan*. Many civic buildings were designed and built under the aegis of this plan. Anthony Peter "Dutch" Hamann was sworn in as Campbell's replacement on March 27, 1950 - the Centennial of San José's incorporation. Appointed by a pro-growth majority on the City Council, Hamann began an aggressive annexation program. Aiming to make San José the commercial and industrial leader of the Bay Area, Hamann annexed 1,419 acres by the end of 1969.<sup>2</sup> As these lands were annexed their value for development soared and escalating property taxes forced ranchers off their land. In this way

<sup>2</sup> PAST Consultants, LLC, *Historic Context Statement for San José Modernism*, 27.

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suburbanization became a self-perpetuating cycle, and Hamann's leapfrogging annexations succeeded in pushing the suburban frontier out further and further.

In 1952, Hamann's staff prepared a report titled: *Planning San José*. This report outlined recommendations for expanding auto-centered development into the Santa Clara Valley's rural hinterlands. The document explicitly acknowledged the primacy of the automobile in modern planning, rejecting San José's small and antiquated central business district.<sup>3</sup> The neighborhood shopping center was identified as the model for future development, and Hamann made building automobile-related infrastructure a top priority for his capital improvement plans. Hamann proposed the construction of several new freeways and the widening of many rural two-lane roads into multi-lane arterial boulevards, called expressways. He also tapped the Federal Aid Highway Acts of 1952 and 1956, making millions of dollars available for highway expansion, including the construction of the Sinclair Freeway (Interstate 280), just south of the future Century 21 Theater site, as well widening Winchester Boulevard (formerly the two-lane Santa Clara-Santa Cruz Road) to six lanes.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Historic Context: Modernism in San José**

The huge growth of San José between 1940 and 1969 produced hundreds of modernist buildings of every functional type, including civic, industrial, commercial, and religious. Commercial buildings in particular were representative of the postwar embrace of the automobile, including shopping centers, drive-in restaurants, automobile sales and repair facilities, service stations, and drive-in banks and theaters.<sup>5</sup> The mushrooming population also propelled the need for professional services, with medical and dental offices often constructed in modernist designs. Modernism was also the most popular choice for most new civic buildings, including schools, fire stations, and libraries, as well as San José's new City Hall and the adjoining joint City/County Civic Center.

San José's rapid centrifugal expansion especially required new retail shopping centers, which blossomed along the numerous arterial roadways, especially near freeway interchanges. Town and Country Village Shopping Center was built on the east side of S. Winchester Boulevard (directly opposite the Century 21 Theater) in the early 1960s. Convenient features for motorists, including off-street parking and drive-through lanes, became key considerations in the location and design of retail developments. Because people traveling in automobiles were moving faster than traditional modes of transportation, many commercial buildings were designed in eye-catching styles that often incorporated imagery depicting Space Age motifs like flying saucers, Sputniks, starbursts, boomerangs, or atoms. The Century 21 Theater, constructed in 1964 near Winchester Boulevard's future interchange with Interstate 280, is one

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 42.



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of the foremost examples of this popularized type of modernist commercial architecture in San José.

#### Historic Context: Site History

The subject property is part of what was historically part of a 66-acre ranch surrounding the Winchester Mystery House.<sup>6</sup> The Winchester House was developed over a period of 38 years by Sarah Winchester, widow of William Winchester, heir of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. Following the death of their daughter Annie in 1866 and of William Winchester in 1881, Sarah Winchester visited a medium who told her that the spirits of those slain by Winchester rifles were seeking revenge on her family. In 1884, Winchester left New Haven, Connecticut and purchased an orchard with a house on the Santa Clara-Santa Cruz Road (now Winchester Boulevard). Winchester immediately began remodeling the farmhouse and over the next 38 years she built multiple additions. It is rumored that Winchester remodeled the house over 600 times. Addition after addition, including stairs and corridors that went nowhere, were supposedly to confuse the spirits allegedly seeking her demise.<sup>7</sup>

Sarah Winchester died in September 1922 at the age of 82. She left the property to her niece Marion "Daisy" Merriam Marriott, who removed the furniture and put the property up for sale in 1923. Though there was interest in the surrounding plum and apricot orchards, few were interested in the outdated house. Unable to sell it, the Winchester heirs leased the property to John and Mamie Brown. The Browns, who had previously owned an amusement park, saw commercial potential in the mysterious house. The house opened to the public as a museum and roadside attraction in May 1923. It soon became a popular destination for those interested in the occult mysteries of San José's very own "House of Usher." In 1931, the Browns purchased the property from the Winchester heirs and subdivided and sold most of the surrounding 66 acres. They kept the 15 acres surrounding the house to serve as a buffer against future development.<sup>8</sup> This property, which encompasses the Winchester Theater complex – an area bounded by Olin Avenue, S. Winchester Boulevard, I-280, and the San José city limits – continues to belong to the Browns' heirs, including members of the Farris and Raney families.<sup>9</sup>

The property surrounding the Winchester House remained in agricultural use for decades following Sarah Winchester's death. By the late 1940s, suburban development was already

<sup>6</sup> "Winchester Mystery House" is trademarked by the current operator of the property. The nomination references the more historically accurate "Winchester House."

<sup>7</sup> Mary Jo Ignoffo, *Captive of the Labyrinth: Sarah L. Winchester, Heiress to the Rifle Fortune* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 204-209.

<sup>8</sup> According to an article in the *Fresno Bee*, the owners of Winchester Investments include Edna May Raney of Belmont, Gerard Raney of Redwood City, Ray Farris Sr. of Monte Sereno, Ray Farris II and Sandra Farris of Monte Sereno, and Valerie Bovone of San José. Shannon Barry, "Winchester Mystery House: Historical Landmark Comes to Life for Halloween," *San Jose Mercury News* (October 22, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Jake Batsell, "Ownership of Winchester House is Biggest Mystery; Safety and Privacy keep Owners of San Jose Landmark Quiet," *Fresno Bee* (June 1, 1997).

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creeping south and west from downtown San José. A 1948 aerial photograph shows the Winchester property surrounded by orchards, though housing tracts are visible just south of Stevens Creek Boulevard. By 1956, the Winchester property was bounded by housing tracts to the north and to the west. Winchester Boulevard was still a two-lane country road on the 1956 aerial, and the subject property was still largely devoted to agriculture, including pasture and orchards, with the Winchester House, its gardens, and barns and outbuildings clustered at the southeast corner of the property (Figure 1).

#### Historic Context: Design and Construction of the Century 21 Theater

In 1963, the Brown heirs entered into an agreement with Raymond "Ray" Syufy to build a theater complex on the undeveloped part of the Winchester property, entering a 50-year lease agreement with Syufy. Syufy was a 44-year-old theater developer who had built a chain of drive-in and traditional sit-down movie theaters across the San Francisco Bay Area.

Raymond Syufy was born in Sacramento in 1920 to Lebanese immigrants, William and Pauline Syufy. He grew up in Berkeley, where he worked in his parents' grocery store. While Syufy was attending law school at UC Berkeley, his mother learned about a small, unfinished movie theater in Vallejo called The Rita that was for sale. Pauline Syufy mortgaged the family business to buy it "so her son could show her what he could do." Ray Syufy, who was already working part-time as a theater usher, quit law school to run the new business, which he reopened in 1943. Almost immediately Syufy faced lawsuits from several major movie studios, including Fox and Paramount. They sued him because he was showing first-run films without permission. Syufy decided to fight back, and in 1947, he filed a \$1 million lawsuit against the major Hollywood studios, alleging monopolistic practices in the distribution of motion pictures. Syufy had apparently latched onto the same arguments used in antitrust litigation that the Department of Justice had been pursuing since 1938. Syufy eventually filed nearly a dozen lawsuits against the studios and undoubtedly played a significant part in the court-ordered demise of the "Studio System." As part of the court decision, the studios were forced to divest themselves of their movie theaters, a boon for independent operators like Syufy.<sup>10</sup>

In 1949, sensing the change in post-war America and the migration of people to the newly developing suburbs, Syufy built his first drive-in movie theater in Vallejo, adding it to three other indoor theaters he owned in that city. During the 1950s, Syufy concentrated on drive-ins, building the Geneva and Mission Drive-in Theaters in San Francisco and others in Union City, Cupertino, Burlingame, and Las Vegas.<sup>11</sup> In the 1960s, Ray Syufy decided to move into the fast-growing Santa Clara Valley. His first theater in the area, the subject of this nomination, was also

<sup>10</sup> Suzanne Donahue, *American Film Distribution* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Bladen, "Twin Drive-in Theater," *San Mateo Times* (June 26, 1965), 12A. "Vallejo Theater Operators Sue Studios, Film Distributors for Million Damages," *Oakland Tribune* (May 6, 1947). Charles Hurd, "Film Booking Issue Ordered Reopened," *The New York Times* (May 4, 1948). Obituary: "Raymond Syufy," *San Francisco Chronicle* (April 2, 1995).

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his first "Cinerama" dome theater. The name Syufy chose for the theater, "Century 21," was a reference to the upcoming millennium, or more simply "the future" and everything that it evoked to mid-century Americans, including space travel and other science fiction-inspired ideas of what it meant to be modern.

Syufy hired architect Vincent G. Raney to design his new Century 21 Theater. Raney was related to the owners of the Winchester property through his wife, Edna (née Brown) Raney, daughter of John and Mayme Brown. Raney did not win the commission through his family connections; he had been working with Syufy since at least 1946. Instead, Raney was likely the figure who suggested to his in-laws that they strike a deal with Ray Syufy to develop the undeveloped portion of the Winchester property.

Inspired by the recently completed Cinerama Dome in Hollywood (completed in 1963), Raney's original design for the Century 21 Theater shows some departures from its counterpart in Southern California, which was as an actual geodesic dome inspired by the work of architect and theorist R. Buckminster Fuller. Instead of multiple pre-cast concrete panels, Raney designed a very simple and smooth hemispherical dome supported by huge, curved steel ribs. Though the original drawings do not seem to have survived, drawings of the Pleasant Hill CineArts Dome (demolished in 2013) show an almost exact twin to the Century 21 Theater. The Pleasant Hill dome did not have an extruded projection room or the distinctive zig-zag molding on the parapet of the Century 21 Theater (Figure 2).

Whereas the Hollywood Cinerama Dome gains much of its visual interest by virtue of its multi-faceted geodesic dome, the Century 21 Theater's dome has a smooth profile because of its simpler construction.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps to make up for its inherent simplicity, Raney designed a huge starburst motif (made of shingles of two contrasting colors) and an antenna-like steel finial mounted to the top of the dome. Combined with the overall shape of the dome, the finial gives the theater the appearance of a flying saucer, a very common Space Age motif during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>13</sup> Early renderings of the property show it paired against another Space Age-style business, the Bob's Big Boy (now Flames Coffee Shop) built at 449 S. Winchester Boulevard. The Bob's Big Boy signage recalls a rocket ship and the upswept roof resembles an airplane wing (Figure 3).

The Century 21 Theater opened for business on November, 24 1964. Advertisements in Bay Area newspapers billed it as "Northern California's most unusual and luxurious theatre."<sup>14</sup> Others said that it would usher in "a new era in entertainment." United Artists' *It's a Mad, Mad,*

<sup>12</sup> Los Angeles Department of City Planning, "Designated Historic-Cultural Monuments," <http://www.preservation.lacity.org/node/45/>

<sup>13</sup> The finial may also be a subtle reference to the dozens of turned wooden finials on the nearby Winchester House.

<sup>14</sup> "Now....See Cinerama in San Jose," Advertisement, *Hayward Daily Review* (November 25, 1964).



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*Mad, Mad World*, which was filmed using the new three-camera Cinerama system, was the first film shown to the public at the Century 21 Theater. Designed as an in-the-round theater, with a large 164 degree screen, the Century 21 Theater was designed to exhibit Cinerama films, a predecessor to IMAX.<sup>15</sup> Early Cinerama films used a three-camera and three-projector system to give the film a three-dimensional quality. Unfortunately they were expensive to film and even more troublesome to project, especially keeping all three projectors in sync.<sup>16</sup> Learning from the problems that faced other early Cinerama theaters, Syufy dispensed with the three-projector system at the Century 21 Theater and substituted a simpler single-lens, 70 mm process in its place. The technology was able to show Cinerama-type films in a similar format as the original, with the viewer feeling as if he or she was physically part of the film.

The Century 21 Theater was the first of three theaters that would eventually become the Winchester Theaters complex. It is not known if they were all originally planned, but as this part of suburban Santa Clara County continued to grow, especially after the completion of Interstate 280, Syufy added additional theaters.<sup>17</sup> In 1966, Syufy Enterprises constructed the Century 22 Theater at 3162 Olin Avenue, just north of the Century 21 Theater. The Century 23 Theater was built next, in 1968, on the south side of Olsen Drive. In contrast to the Century 21 Theater, Century 23 was a split dome, meaning that its interior was divided into two theaters instead of the classic theater-in-the-round format of Century 21. An aerial photograph taken in 1968 shows the property with all three Century theaters completed. The photograph also shows the Bob's Big Boy coffee shop at the northeast corner of the property, a small cluster of oaks between the theaters and the coffee shop, and a remnant orchard between the Century 23 Theater and Interstate 280 (Figure 4). During the following years Syufy built additional domes in San José, including Century 24, at 741 S. Winchester Boulevard (also a split dome), in 1968; and Century 25, at 1694 Saratoga Avenue (a split dome), in 1969.<sup>18</sup> Eventually the orchard was removed and the patch of pasture and oaks turned into additional parking, leaving the Winchester House the final remaining vestige of the property's rural heritage. After 1975, the Century 22 Theater was expanded in size with the addition of two smaller domes on its east façade.

Throughout the time that Syufy Enterprises operated the Century 21 Theater it served as a first-run theater. It was unusual and different from other theaters in the area because patrons could reserve their seats in advance of the show. The Century 21 Theater locally premiered dozens of blockbusters, including *Battle of the Bulge* (1966), *Grand Prix* (1967), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Krakatoa, East of Java* (1969), and *Star Wars* (1977).<sup>19</sup> The theater was equipped with a

<sup>15</sup> Michael Coate, "Remembering Cinerama," *Cinema Treasures*:  
<http://cinematreasures.org/blog/2012/6/15/remembering-cinerama-part-53-san-jose>

<sup>16</sup> "Preview Opens Hollywood's New Theater," *Los Angeles Times* (November 4, 1963).

<sup>17</sup> The subject property was not annexed to the City of San José until 1980.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Heather David, author, *Mid-Century by the Bay*, June 1, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Coate, "Remembering Cinerama," *Cinema Treasures*:  
<http://cinematreasures.org/blog/2012/6/15/remembering-cinerama-part-53-san-jose>



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state-of-the-art dual-channel audio system, installed by the Ampex Company, based in nearby Redwood City. Even as freestanding movie theaters began to disappear in the 1970s and 1980s because of competition from multiplexes, and later during the 1990s and 2000s, as Americans began watching more movies at home, Century 21 and its neighboring Century 22 and Century 23 Theaters remained open and prosperous.

Eventually, Syufy's Century Theater chain (named for the Century 21 Theater in San José – the first to bear the Century badge) grew to encompass almost 1,000 screens in five western states. A long-time Sausalito resident and trustee of St. Mary's College in Moraga, Mr. Syufy died in 1995. After Ray Syufy's death, management of the Century Theater chain passed to his sons Joe and Ray Syufy, Jr. By the time they sold the family business to Cinemark USA in 2006, the Century chain operated 78 theaters in the West, with a total of 994 screens.<sup>20</sup> As part of the deal the Syufy family retained the Century 21, 22, and 23 Theaters in San José. Ray Syufy's 50-year lease of the property expired in 2013. The Century 21 Theater is currently rented to Guggenheim Entertainment, operating the theater as The Retro Dome.

#### **Historic Context: Movie Theater Design**

The earliest motion pictures were projected in a variety of spaces, including town halls, churches, amusement parks, county fair tents, playhouses, and Vaudeville theaters. Most early movies were brief "shorts" – plot-less features designed to show off the capabilities of the new medium. After 1900, storefront theaters or "nickelodeons" became a national craze, opening across the United States. These businesses were typically housed in standard commercial storefronts and were rarely more than a collection of chairs set up in front of a stage, with a curtain separating the "lobby" from the viewing area.

From early on, nickelodeons (so-called because they typically cost a nickel to attend) gained a reputation as uncouth establishments geared toward the lower classes. Upper-class people tended to avoid them, preferring to patronize the so-called "legitimate theater." The first purpose-built movie theater was likely Tally's Electric Theater in Los Angeles, which was built in 1902. This theater and later counterparts showed "picture plays" – dramatized features filmed specifically for movie theaters. Some were shown in Vaudeville houses between live acts, which exposed them to more discerning audiences in the 1910s. One of the first full-length feature films ever made was D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, which opened in 1915.<sup>21</sup>

The movie industry grew tremendously after the First World War, especially during the 1920s as Americans began flocking to increasingly monumental and fantastic "movie palaces" designed by firms like Rapp & Rapp, S. Charles Lee, and others. Between 1914 and 1922, 4,000 new movie theaters opened across the United States. These gilded and often gaudy theaters could oftentimes seat upwards of 2,500 customers. Designed in the Beaux-Arts, Classical Revival, and

<sup>20</sup> Tom Abate, "Century Theatre Chain sold to Texas Operator," *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 9, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> David Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987), 15.

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later Art Deco, Spanish Colonial, Moorish, and Egyptian Revival styles (among others), American movie palaces offered dozens of amenities, including smoking rooms, nurseries, state-of-the-art ventilation and air conditioning, as well as elaborate snack bars and promenade lobbies where people could "see and be seen." Their exotic styling and high level of architectural finishes created an atmosphere of three-dimensional fantasy to accompany the two-dimensional fantasy on the screen, where regular people could escape the humdrum realities of everyday life.<sup>22</sup> By the late 1920s, movie theaters had largely put vaudeville out of business, becoming one of America's favorite pastimes.

The Depression hit the motion picture industry hard. Construction of new theaters slowed, though many older theaters (some barely more than a decade old) were remodeled in the Art Deco style, in an effort to attract new patrons during tough economic times. In addition, many smaller towns got their own theaters because the urban markets were oversaturated. The advent of sound in 1927 and the arrival of color in the 1930s resulted in an uptick in movie-going. By the mid-to-late 1940s, wartime austerity and changing tastes led to simpler and more utilitarian theaters. In addition, wartime gasoline rationing, which made travel to urban centers more expensive, led to the construction of many neighborhood and small town theaters.<sup>23</sup>

#### **Historic Context: Mid-Century Movie Theater Design**

Movie theater design was only one of many changes that accompanied the end of World War II. Returning GIs took advantage of subsidized loans to purchase new homes in the suburbs, which builders were all too happy to supply. Federal highways hastened the suburban diaspora away from the city centers. As housing tracts took the places of orchards and farms, developers built auto-oriented shopping centers, banks, and theaters to serve the new residents. The suburban exodus, combined with the popularity of television in the early 1950s, presented major challenges and opportunities to movie theater operators. Entrepreneurs like Ray Syufy responded by building new state-of-the-art theaters in the fast-growing suburbs, including drive-in theaters, shopping center theaters, and dome theaters. Attracted by their futuristic designs, many Americans patronized these new suburban theaters after abandoning the old downtown movie palaces of the 1920s and 1930s. Patrons liked the new theaters because of their convenience, cleanliness, novelty, as well as their increasingly sophisticated sound and projection systems. The use of modernist design idioms for the new suburban theaters – in particular the flying saucer-like dome theaters – catered to the imaginative and forward-thinking mindset of mid-century America, in particular the Santa Clara Valley, where the first high-tech revolution was underway. In contrast to pre-war movie-goers who went to see movies in historicist theaters designed to resemble Rococo palaces or exotic Hindu temples, their post-war counterparts preferred theaters that reflected the culture's growing interest in

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 15.

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science, and space exploration – in large part kicked off by the launching of Sputnik in 1957 and the ensuing Space Race.<sup>24</sup>

### Cinerama-type Dome Theaters

In 1952, a young company debuted a new, almost immersive, way to watch movies on a huge curved screen, in the hopes that this new type of experience would lure Americans away from their television sets and back into the movie theaters. The company, Cinerama Inc., named for its proprietary technology, was the result of a 13-year development process by inventor Fred Waller.<sup>25</sup> Cinerama was a way to film and exhibit movies using three cameras and three projectors, with the resulting films projected onto a wide, curved screen that made movie patrons feel like they were in the movie. The technology was a precursor to IMAX large-screen films and has a huge cult following among movie buffs. The history of Cinerama was the subject of a 2002 documentary called *Cinerama Adventure*. By the early 1960s, the company was having financial troubles. Its technology was expensive to use and in order to get theaters to participate, Cinerama had to spend its own money to renovate, equip, and install its own equipment in its clients' theaters.<sup>26</sup> By early 1963, 63 theaters in the U.S. and 40 abroad had been equipped to show the increasing number of films shot in Cinerama, including the pioneering 1962 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer epic, *How the West Was Won*.<sup>27</sup>

In February 1963, Cinerama announced plans for what should have been the perfect vehicle for its technology: a theater within a low-cost geodesic dome pioneered by the eccentric architect and inventor, R. Buckminster Fuller. The curved walls of the geodesic dome were ideal for Cinerama and other wide-screen film projection systems because they could be built without any interior columns or beams that would block the view. In addition, geodesic domes were low-cost buildings that could, in theory, be built for roughly half of what a typical movie theater of the 1960s would cost – and, if done correctly, they could be built in 12 to 14 weeks.<sup>28</sup> Geodesic domes had already proven their worth; by 1959, more than 1,000 had been erected around the world, and some of the licensees of Fuller's patented design included the U.S. Air Force and the State Department.<sup>29</sup>

In February 1963, the president of Cinerama, Inc. announced plans for a large geodesic dome theater to be built in the heart of Hollywood, on Sunset Boulevard, near Vine Street. Cinerama had ambitious hopes that 300 of this type would be built across the U.S. as part of a new theater chain owned and operated by the company. Planned and built in fewer than six

<sup>24</sup> Howard Thompson, "New Trend in Movies Grows at Suburban Shopping Centers," *New York Times* (March 7, 1964).

<sup>25</sup> Cinerama Adventure, Cinerama Pioneer Biographies, "Biography of Fred Waller."  
<http://www.cineramaadventure.com/pioneers.htm>

<sup>26</sup> "No Happy Ending in Sight for Cinerama," *Los Angeles Times* (December 23, 1964).

<sup>27</sup> "Cinerama Backs a New Theater," *New York Times* (February 6, 1963).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> "The Breakthrough of Buckminster Fuller," *New York Times* (August 23, 1959).

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months, the Hollywood Cinerama Dome opened to fanfare in November 1963 with Stanley Kramer's *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*.<sup>30</sup> The theater, 135 feet in diameter with a 51-foot high ceiling, was made of 316 pre-cast concrete panels in 35 different configurations (Figure 5). In addition to being the first Cinerama dome, it was also the first theater to showcase the new, less expensive single-lens, 70mm Cinerama projection system that was later used at the Century 21 Theater. The Cinerama Dome in Hollywood, which was designated a Los Angeles Cultural-Historic Monument in 1998, never showed a film in the original three-camera Cinerama projection mode until after its restoration in 2001.<sup>31</sup>

While Cinerama, Inc. expected that hundreds of geodesic dome theaters would follow the example of Hollywood's Cinerama Dome, most theater developers who built domes during the next decade eschewed the Monohex design patented by Buckminster Fuller. Reasons for this include the fact that many theater chains simply did not want to pay the hefty licensing fees to Fuller or Cinerama, Inc.<sup>32</sup> When Ray Syufy decided to open his first dome theater in San José, he opted for the much simpler and cheaper hemispherical dome. Syufy's architect, Vincent Raney, used Cinerama's drawings to develop the plan and general layout of the theater, but in place of the Monohex frame, he substituted steel ribs that converged at the top of the dome, dividing the building into a series of pie-shaped wedges. The Century 21 Theater that opened in 1964 became the prototype for all of the later freestanding Century domes, including 22, 23, 24, 25, and many others throughout the Bay Area.<sup>33</sup>

When the Century 21 Theater was completed, domes were thought of as a symbol of the future. At the 1964/1965 World's Fair in New York, which opened in April 1964, several corporate pavilions were built using giant domes as part of their exhibits, where companies like IBM, General Electric, and Eastman Kodak showed corporate promotional videos in their domed theaters. IBM advertised its "People Wall," where "a new kind of living picture entertainment leaps out at you" from 15 screens inside a 90-foot high egg-shaped dome. IBM's theater dome was a collaboration of designers Ray and Charles Eames and architect Eero Saarinen and was one of Saarinen's last works.<sup>34</sup>

It is not known how many dome theaters still remain in the United States. What is certain is that many have closed and been demolished, bearing the brunt of rising land values and Americans' propensity to consume entertainment at home and on their mobile devices. A sampling of lost dome theaters in California include the Orange Cinedome complex in Orange, which was demolished in 1999; the CineArts complex in Burlingame, closed in 2008; the Cinedome 7 in Newark, closed in 2012; the Cinedome 8 in Napa, also closed in 2012; and the

<sup>30</sup> "Domed Theater will be a First," *Los Angeles Times* (October 13, 1963).

<sup>31</sup> Philip K. Scheuer, "Cinerama and the Cinema Boom in Suburbia," *Los Angeles Times*, (September 29, 1963), "A Hollywood Happy Ending," *Los Angeles Times*, (December 4, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> "New Version of Geodesic Dome is Patented," *New York Times* (August 7, 1965).

<sup>33</sup> Frederic A. Sharf, *Suburban America, 1930-1970* (San Francisco: Newbury Press, 2001), 16, and 54.

<sup>34</sup> "IBM 'People Wall' Lifts You Into a New World of Wonders," *New York Times* (June 29, 1964).



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CineArts Dome in Pleasant Hill, demolished in 2013. Aside from the landmarked Hollywood Cinerama Dome, the Century 21-23 complex may be one of the last examples of its type that remains open.

**Historic Context: Vincent G. Raney**

Vincent G. Raney, the architect of the Century 21 Theater, was born in Loogootee, Indiana, on October 17, 1905. After stints at the University of Indiana and the University of Arizona, Raney graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in architectural engineering in 1930. Within a year he had moved to San Francisco, taking up residence at 749 Taylor Street. Initially he worked as a freelance draftsman for Frederick J. Reimers and William I. Garren, remaining as a part-time employee there from 1930 until 1936. At the same time he also worked for Masten & Hurd, remaining there from 1934 until 1935. Though Raney opened his own architectural practice as early as 1935, he continued to moonlight for other more established firms during the mid-to-late 1930s, when work was scarce and cobbling together a livelihood as an architect was not easy. In 1935, he married Edna Brown, a native of Canada. Her father was John Brown, an inventor and an entrepreneur who first turned the Winchester House into a roadside attraction in 1923. By 1940, the Raney family lived at 507 Castenada Avenue in San Francisco's prosperous Forest Hills neighborhood. Vincent and Edna had one daughter, Elizabeth Ann (born 1937) and one son, Gerard Eugene (born 1940).<sup>35</sup>

Vincent Raney, who specialized in commercial projects, designed many roadside works, including over 600 service stations and dozens of movie theaters and shopping centers. He also designed industrial buildings and churches and schools, including several high-profile commissions for the Catholic Church.<sup>36</sup> One of his first commissions was the Round House Restaurant (1938), a circular restaurant designed in the Streamline Moderne style next to the southern approach to the Golden Gate Bridge. Several of his better-known commissions for the Catholic Church include Saint Ann's Chapel in Palo Alto (1951), which was commissioned by Clare Booth Luce; Holy Cross School in Mountain View (1957); and Notre Dame College in Belmont (1961). He also designed the Eitel-McCullough Office Building and Factory in San Carlos (1960).<sup>37</sup> Raney designed 40 or more movie theaters, including traditional urban neighborhood theaters, drive-ins, and shopping center theaters. Most were built between the 1940s and the 1970s, including several for Ray Syufy's fast-growing theater empire, including the Art Deco style Bal Theatre in San Leandro (1946); the Kuhio Theater in Honolulu (1946); the El Rey Theater in Vallejo (1949); the 49er Drive-In Theatre in Del Paso Heights, California (1950); the Burlingame Drive-In in Burlingame (1965); the Capitol 6 Drive-In in San José (1971); and the Scottsdale 6 Drive-In in Scottsdale, Arizona (1977). Nearly all of his theaters have either been

<sup>35</sup> Pacific Coast Architecture Database, "Vincent Gerard Raney."

<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/architects/4537/>.

Frederic A. Sharf, "Suburban America, 1930-1970 (Newbury Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>36</sup> Obituary: "Vincent G. Raney," *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 8, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Pacific Coast Architecture Database, "Vincent Gerard Raney."

<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/architects/4537/>.

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closed or demolished. Later in his career the theaters for Syufy Enterprises were the mainstay of Raney's practice, which he maintained through the mid-1990s. He closed his office soon after Ray Syufy's death in 1995. Vincent Raney died in 2002 at the age of 96.<sup>38</sup>

#### Eligibility Summary

The Century 21 Theater in San José is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C in the Area of Design/Construction at the local level, as a property that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type (suburban dome theater) and period (1960s). The period of significance is 1964, the building's original date of construction. The building is eligible as a distinctive and increasingly rare building type, as well as a symbol of its era and its place – mid-century San José – an emerging hub of aerospace and high technology, where innovative Space Age architecture was appreciated. The theater, the first in owner Ray Syufy's Century Theater chain, represents the transition from the early three-projector Cinerama projection system to the more reliable and easy-to-screen 70 mm process. A predecessor of the IMAX projection system, the 70 mm projection method, in combination with the wide, curved screen, allowed moviegoers to feel as if they were part of the film. Unlike many other dome theaters built to show Cinerama, the Century 21 Theater was never subdivided into smaller auditoriums; indeed, it remains one of the largest theater interiors in Northern California. As a freestanding suburban theater, the Century 21 Theater also represents the evolution from the downtown movie palaces of the pre-World War II period and the shopping center and multiplex theaters of the 1970s and 1980s. Because of its prominent location, the Century 21 Theater remains one of the more notable surviving examples of mid-century commercial architecture in San José. Its bold finial-capped dome, looking like a flying saucer about to take off, remains easily visible from Interstate 280. Its Space Age design was clearly intended to catch the eye of motorists traveling at a high rate of speed through the ever-changing suburban landscape of the post-World War II Santa Clara Valley. Unlike many of its contemporaries, the Century 21 Theater made it to the twenty-first century, a rarity in a city obsessed with the future.

<sup>38</sup> Frederic A. Sharf, *Suburban America, 1930-1970* (Newbury Press, 2001), 16.

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<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/architects/4537/>, Web. Accessed May 28, 2013.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

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**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☒ Local government  
☐ University  
☒ Other

Name of repository: Santa Clara County Assessor's Office  
San Francisco Public Library

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acres of Property** 2.44 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 37.319255 Longitude: -121.952344

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The proposed boundary encompasses a 2.44-acre parcel, which is part of a larger landholding encompassed by Olin Avenue to the north, S. Winchester Boulevard to the east, I-280 to the south, and the San José city limits to the west. The site proposed for listing in the National Register encompasses only the Century 21 Theater and its immediate setting as defined by the boundaries of assessor parcel 303-40-010.

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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The proposed boundaries encompass only assessor parcel number 303-40-010, which includes the Century 21 Theater, the oldest and most intact of all three surviving dome theaters on the larger property. The rest of the site was excluded from this nomination because of eligibility and integrity concerns – the Century 22 Dome was built in 1966 and expanded with two additional domed auditoriums after 1975. The Century 23 dome was built in 1968.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Christopher P. VerPlanck  
organization: DoCoMoMo Northern California Chapter  
street & number: P.O. Box 29226  
city or town: San Francisco state: California zip code: 94129-0226  
e-mail chris@verplanckconsulting.com  
telephone: (415) 391-7486  
date: June 2013; Revised January 2014

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Sketch Map



Map showing location of the Century 21 Theater  
Source: Santa Clara County; annotated by Christopher VerPlanck



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**Additional Information**



Figure 1. 1956 aerial showing the future location of the Century 21 Theater; north is up  
Source: Historic Aerials



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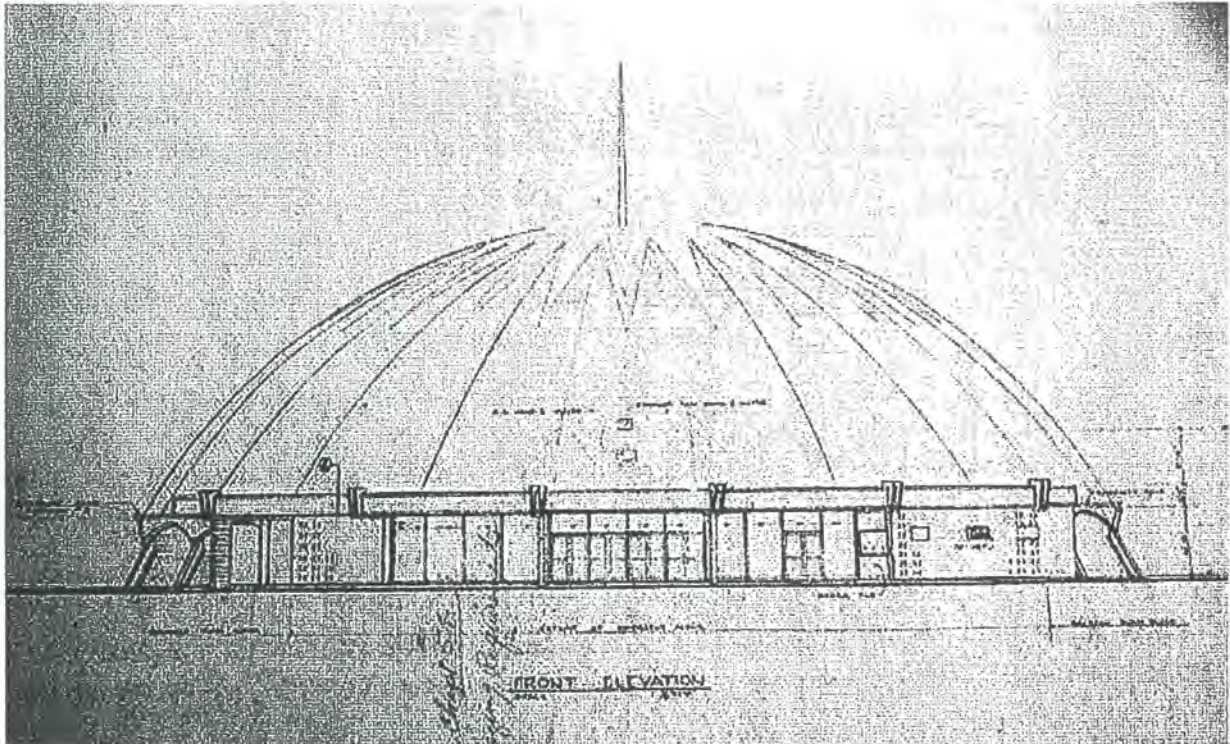


Figure 2. Original east elevation of the ClineArts Dome in Pleasant Hill  
Source: Collection of Heather David

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Figure 3. Bob's Big Boy, c. 1965  
with the Century 21 Theater in the background



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Figure 4. 1968 aerial photograph showing the Winchester Theater complex; north is up  
Source: Historic Aerials



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Figure 5. Opening of the Hollywood Cinerama Dome, 1963

Source: Los Angeles Public Library

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### Photograph Log

Name of Property: Century 21 Theater  
City: San José  
County: Santa Clara  
State: California  
Name of Photographer: Christopher VerPlanck  
Date of Photographs: June 6, 2013  
Location of Original Digital Files: 57 Post Street, Suite 512, San Francisco, California  
94104  
Number of Photographs: 10

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0001  
Sign, camera facing south

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0002  
Overall perspective, camera facing west

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0003  
East façade, camera facing northwest

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0004  
Main entrance, camera facing west

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0005  
Detail of concrete block walls, camera facing south

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0006  
North façade, camera facing south

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0007  
Detail of steel rib, camera facing south

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0008  
Detail of finial, camera facing northeast

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0009  
Auditorium and screen, camera facing northwest

CA\_Santa Clara County\_Century 21 Theater\_0010  
Dome, camera facing east

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

1725 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 100  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95816  
(916) 445-7000 Fax: (916) 445-7053  
calshpo@parks.ca.gov  
www.ohp.parks.ca.gov



**MEETING NOTICE**

**FOR:** State Historical Resources Commission Quarterly Meeting

**DATE:** Tuesday, April 22, 2014

**TIME:** 9:00 A.M.

**PLACE:** Kiln Room  
Asilomar Conference Center  
800 Asilomar Avenue  
Pacific Grove, California 93950

This room is accessible to people with disabilities. Questions regarding the meeting should be directed to the Registration Unit (916) 445-7008







*Chuck Reed*  
MAYOR

April 7, 2014

Carol Roland-Nawi, Ph.D  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
Office of Historic Preservation  
Department of Parks and Recreation  
P.O. Box 942896  
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

Dear Ms. Roland-Nawi:

I write in response to your letter dated February 12, 2014, in which you provide the City of San Jose with a 60-day review and comment period before the State Historic Resources Commission takes action on a National Register of Historic Places nomination of Century 21.

On March 18, 2014, the San Jose City Council heard public testimony regarding the proposed National Listing. The Council then deliberated on the contents of my comment letter to the State Office of Historic Preservation. I offer the following comments:

- The Envision San Jose 2040 General Plan adopted by the San Jose City Council in 2011 provides the framework to plan for new job and housing growth in Urban Villages that promote transit-oriented, mixed-use urban settings.
- The Winchester Mystery House (listed on the National Register, and a State and City landmark) and the Century Theaters, all currently owned by family members of Architect Vincent Raney, are located in the Santana Row-Valley Fair Urban Village.
- The Santana Row-Valley Fair Urban Village provides for the potential of 2,410 new jobs, 2,635 new dwelling units, and 723,000 square feet of non-residential use to be developed.
- The City has promoted the site to the investment and development community as a prime opportunity site for jobs, housing and commercial use. There is no development application on file at this time.
- The theaters are considered by the owners to be obsolete and practically unusable as theaters or as adaptive re-use space for office, residential or commercial purposes. According to the owners, the building is a special purpose building for which its original intended use is no longer viable, and its physical attributes prohibit it from being re-used on an economic basis. See the attached letter from Michelle Bevis dated January 10, 2014 (Attachment 1).
- While there is a Special Use Permit pending for the demolition of the theaters, there is no development application on file with the City for the redevelopment of the property.

- The City's Historic Landmarks Commission nominated Century 21 and the larger site for City Landmark status at its January 9, 2014 meeting. The City has not received an application to advance that proposed nomination. The Preservation Action Council of San José however, had recently notified the City of its intention to pursue National Register designation, without completing the City Landmark application. However, at the March 18<sup>th</sup> San Jose City Council meeting, Council directed the City Administration to proceed with the local City Landmark process. The synopsis of the Historic Landmarks Commission March 11, 2014 meeting commenting on the proposed National Register Designation is attached (Attachment 2).
- The Century 21 nomination application was prepared by Christopher VerPlanck of DOCOMOMO in June 2013, and revised in January 2014. Mr. VerPlanck has not contacted the City about our General Plan, economic development and historic preservation objectives.
- An independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party analysis of Century 21, prepared for the City by consultant Archives and Architecture concludes that the Century 21 is eligible for listing on the National Register.
- San Jose's General Plan has historic preservation policies to protect its unique heritage.
- The City is proud of its decades-long commitment to historic preservation, and its track record of public investments to move, restore and program historic resources that contribute to a vibrant city. More than \$150 million was invested by the City's Redevelopment Agency in preserving, rehabilitating and renovating historic landmarks such as the California Fox Theater, Jose Theater, Montgomery Hotel, the Fallon House, the Peralta Adobe and the Museum of Art. The City has also worked successfully to encourage public-private partnerships in restoring historic assets such as the DeAnza Hotel and Sainte Claire Hotel, with about \$17 million in redevelopment funds being invested in the preservation of the two downtown hotels.

## RECOMMENDATION

I am concerned that the State Historic Resources Commission would take action on such a significant matter with only a 60-day review and comment period granted to the City. I respectfully request that the State Historic Resources Commission take no action on this matter until such time as the City Landmark process has been completed. Local land use authority rests with the San Jose City Council. We will fairly evaluate any and all interest on the part of our community to restore, retrofit, or preserve Century 21. This will be done in conjunction with a development proposal for the property. Only then could the best choices for San Jose be determined.

Sincerely,



Chuck Reed  
Mayor

Attachments:

Letter from Michelle Bevis Ph.D., M.A. Psychology  
Historic Landmark Commission Memorandum

CC:

Vice Mayor Madison Nguyen  
Councilmember Pete Constant  
Councilmember Ash Kalra  
Councilmember Sam Liccardo  
Councilmember Kansen Chu  
Councilmember Xavier Campos  
Councilmember Pierluigi Oliverio  
Councilmember Rose Herrera  
Councilmember Donald Rocha  
Councilmember Johnny Khamis

## ARCHIVES & ARCHITECTURE, LLC

PO Box 1332  
San José CA 95109-1332  
408.297.2684  
408.228.0762 FAX  
[www.archivesandarchitecture.com](http://www.archivesandarchitecture.com)

March 3, 2014

Richard Buikema, Senior Planner (Historic Preservation Officer)  
City of San José Dept. of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement  
200 East Santa Clara St.  
San José, CA 95113

Re: **Century 21 Theater** (*Peer*) *Review and Findings Report*  
of the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Forms  
prepared by (Christopher P. VerPlanck/DoCoMoMo Northern California Chapter, 2014)

Dear Mr. Buikema:

Pursuant to your request and authorization of February 28, 2014, Archives & Architecture, LLC, has reviewed the documentation of the National Register of Historic Places nomination of Century 21 Theater (Winchester Theater 21), located at 3061 Olsen Drive in San José, California. The nomination forms were prepared by Christopher P. VerPlanck on behalf of DOCOMOMO US/Northern California Chapter. This nomination has been submitted to the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP), and will be reviewed by the State Historical Resources Commission (SHRC) on April 22, 2014, at their meeting at Asilomar, Pacific Grove, prior to being forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register in Washington D.C. for final determination.

According to the Certified Local Government Agreement between the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) and the City of San José, the chief elected official (mayor) of the City of San José has been provided an opportunity to review and comment on the nomination. Additionally, pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended, the nomination has also been provided to the San José Historic Landmarks Commission (local preservation commission), who may provide comments to the mayor on whether or not the nominated property, in its opinion, meets the criteria for the National Register. Both comments should be transmitted to the State Historic Preservation Officer, Carol Roland-Nawi, Ph.D. for submittal to the SHRC. The City has been given a 60-day period in which to review and comment on the nomination before the State Historical Resources Commission (SHRC) takes action in April.

The document we reviewed was provided digitally to us by the City of San José on February 27, 2014, and includes a letter from Carol Roland-Nawi, Ph.D, dated February 12, 2014, addressed to The Honorable Mayor Chuck Reed, and consists of 35 pages of NPS 10-900 Forms. The NPS forms are also presently available for view online at OHP's website, and include recent color photographs.

### QUALIFICATIONS

This review letter was prepared by Franklin Maggi, Architectural Historian in collaboration with Leslie A. G. Dill, Historic Architect/Architectural Historian, and Sarah E. Winder, Historian. Both Franklin Maggi and Leslie A. G. Dill are partners in the firm of Archives & Architecture, LLC, and Sarah E. Winder is a staff historian. All three are listed within their respective fields with the California Historic Resource Information System (CHRIS), operated under authority of the



California State Office of Historic Preservation, and meet the Secretary of the Interior's qualifications to perform identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities within their respective fields in compliance with state and federal environmental laws. CHRIS utilizes the criteria of the National Park Service outlined in 36 CFR Part 61.

We have previously submitted or prepared documentation for six National Register nominations:

- Donner-Houghton House (San José)
- John Colpitts Ainsley House (Campbell)
- Seven Springs Ranch (Cupertino)
- Earnest Renzel House (San José)
- Rhoades Ranch (Morgan Hill)
- Mission Soledad (Soledad) pending review at the April 22, 2014 CHRC meeting

Additionally, our firm has prepared about 48 San José/Santa Clara County Landmark nominations for property owners, and the documentation for approximately 70 additional landmark nominations that was done as a part of survey work under contract to the City of San José (a total of about 60% of the current City's listings).

The Century 21 Theater National Register nomination forms were prepared by Christopher VerPlanck on behalf of DOCOMOMO US/Northern California Chapter. *DOCOMOMO promotes the study, interpretation and protection of the architecture, landscape and urban design of the Modern Movement. It promotes the exchange of knowledge about this important legacy which extends from the planned city and iconic monument to the house next door.* Docomomo/NoCa is one of twelve regional chapters of DOCOMOMO US, and DOCOMOMO US is the national working party for DOCOMOMO International, which is currently based in Barcelona.

Christopher VerPlanck is also listed with CHRIS. VanPlanck has previously nominated at least four properties for listing on the National Register, including:

- Sacred Heart Church (San Francisco)
- Don Lee Building (San Francisco)
- New Mission Theater (San Francisco)
- Los Angeles Federal Building (Los Angeles)

#### **BACKGROUND** for this Review

We were not provided and did not review materials noted in the references section of the recording, although we did conduct similar research regarding the development of the Century theaters and the architect of the 1964 Century 21 Theater, Vincent G. Raney. We are not aware of any other recording or evaluation of the building. We also considered the documentation in the context of the guidelines set forth in the Historic Preservation Ordinance of the City of San José as well as qualifications for the San José Historic Resources Inventory as a Candidate City Landmark, pursuant to our authorization to prepare this review.

We had previously prepared an evaluation for the Westgate Theater (Century 25), at 1694 Saratoga Ave., for Federal Realty. That building was recently demolished under permit 2013-134396-CI. We also looked at the historic evaluation within the *Phase I Cultural Resources Assessment* for the

Century 24 demolition project (CP13-048) prepared by Michael Brandman Associates for SyWest Development. Century 24 was also demolished earlier this year.

A reconnaissance of the site and setting was conducted on March 1, 2014. This review is based on the information provided in the above referenced National Register nomination, observations from the reconnaissance, consideration of our own research, as well as readings of the Century 24 documentation and that of the Pleasant Hill Century Theater (CineArts Dome) report by Michael Garavaglia (demolished 2013), and use of the City of San José's *Historic Context Statement for San José Modernism*, prepared by PAST Consultants, LLC, 2009.

The National Park Service (NPS) Form 10-900 recording prepared by Docomomo/NoCa dated June 2013, and revised January 2014, is consistent with the standard format for this type of evaluation for National Register eligibility, and includes a Narrative Description as well as a Statement of Significance based on National Register of Historic Places criteria. The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts worthy of preservation because of their significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. The National Register recognizes resources of local, state and national significance which have been documented and evaluated according to uniform standards and criteria. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect historic and archeological resources. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service, which is part of the U. S. Department of the Interior.

OHP and NPS also provide recommended guidelines for applicants regarding the proper submittal of properties, including but not limited to the *National Register Checklist for Submission*, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (National Register Bulletin #15), and *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin #16A). These guidelines were utilized in the preparation of this independent review.

The forms (National Park Service Form 10-900), are similar in content to the California Department of Parks and Recreation Form 523 (DPR523). The DPR523 recording forms were developed in 1995 to provide a standardized recording format for properties under consideration as historic resources, both locally and at the state level. Most jurisdictions utilize the DPR523 format in the process of determining the significance of a historic property. The *Instructions for Recording* discuss National Register eligibility, but do not include information regarding California Register or local landmark criteria. It has been a standard practice, ever since the 1998 inclusion of California Register eligibility within the amended *Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act*, that California Register and local criteria is considered within the DPR523 forms. The City's preservation ordinance, including local landmark nomination procedures and criteria, was initially adopted by the San José City Council in 1979.

To be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, a property must meet the *National Register Criteria for Evaluation*. This involves examining the property's age, integrity, and significance.

- Age and Integrity. Is the property old enough to be considered historic (generally at least 50 years old) and does it still look much the way it did in the past?
- Significance. Is the property associated with events, activities, or developments that were important in the past? With the lives of people who were important in the past? With



significant architectural history, landscape history, or engineering achievements? Does it have the potential to yield information through archeological investigation about our past?

The criteria applied when evaluating properties for the National Register are worded to provide for a wide diversity of resources. Evaluations according to the criteria considers the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture that is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- (a) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- (b) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- (c) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- (d) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

## REVIEW

In our opinion, the Century 21 National Register nomination is complete and has been prepared consistent with the guidelines of the National Park Service. The document has also been reviewed for completeness by the California Office of Historic Preservation, who has forwarded it to the California Historical Resources Commission for a determination prior to forwarding to the Keeper of the National Register.

The Century 21 Theater building has been nominated as an individual property with a "recreation and culture" use under Criterion C (with an architectural category of Modern Movement/International Style). The nomination states that the building has integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, is significant for its architecture, and has a period of significance of 1964. No *Criteria Considerations*, (such as age), were found to be necessary to help determine eligibility, as the building is around fifty years in age and meets the 50 year requirement without the need to apply Criteria Consideration (G), which pertains to properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years.

The following paragraph summarizes the significance:

*The Century 21 Theater is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C at the local level as an early and notable example of a Cinerama-type theater designed by noted Bay Area architect Vincent G. Raney. The period of significance is 1964, the year that the building was completed. Virtually unaltered on its exterior, the Century 21 Theater embodies the distinctive characteristics of the mid-century modernist style and suburban roadside architecture popular during the 1960s. It is one of the best-known modernist landmarks in San Jose, a city that grew from a small agricultural community during the postwar period into America's tenth largest city and the center*

*of high technology for the world. The Century 21 Theater represents a period of optimism and prosperity in a fast-growing city. Cinerama is the name for a patented widescreen projection system that uses three synchronized 35 mm projectors to project images on a curved screen extending 164 degrees. In the United States there are only two theaters currently equipped to show films in Cinerama, the precursor to the wide-screen IMAX projection system of fifty years later. Later, the process was refined so that the Cinerama films could be exhibited with a single-lens projector. The Century 21 Theater in San Jose joins the locally landmarked Cinerama Dome in Hollywood as one of the best surviving examples of the freestanding dome type theater remaining in California.*

In the Eligibility Summary section, it also states:

*...The Century 21 Theater in San Jose is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C in the Area of Design/Construction at the local level, as a property that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type (suburban dome theater) and period (1960s). ...The theater, the first in owner Ray Syufy's Century Theater chain, represents the transition from the early three-projector Cinerama projection system to the more reliable and easy-to-screen 70 mm process....Unlike many other dome theaters built to show Cinerama, the Century 21 Theater was never subdivided into smaller auditoriums; indeed, it remains one of the largest theater interiors in Northern California.....Because of its prominent location, the Century 21 Theater remains one of the more notable surviving examples of mid-century commercial architecture in San Jose...*

After reviewing the nomination, and considering other information from similar reports and our own investigation of Century 25, **we agree with the Statement of Significance promulgated by Docomomo/NoCa in advocating for the registration of Century 21 Theater by listing it on the National Register of Historic Places.**

In reviewing the *Narrative Statement of Significance* and related background information, we also believe that the building is also significant locally for its representation of important patterns of community development in San José related to *Arts, Entertainment, and Culture*. While the focus of Docomomo/NoCa is on modern architecture of distinction, the *Narrative Statement of Significance* provides substantiation to the importance of this building in San José history, even if not considering its architectural design. While the innovative design of the building is reflective of important changes in cultural taste at mid-century, the construction of Century 21 in San José heralded an important period of change in the way we live, as the role of movies and cinema expanded rapidly into new frontiers of technology to shape the way we think and emotionally evolve within modern western culture. During this period, the San José market grew to become the largest in the United States for movies. Going to the cinema at neighborhood theaters continues to be a major part of the lives of local residents, even with the competition from online sources.

Additionally, although the focus of the technological discussion in the nomination has been on the ill-fated three-projector equipment design that the theater was intended to accommodate, the early three-camera/three-projector system that widened the experience for movie-goers proved to be a commercial failure at the time the building was under construction. Panavision's technological innovation in lens design in the 1950s is known for its technological excellence. MGM partnered with Panavision to develop a wide-format production system, first creating the MGM Camera 65 that was eventually marketed as Ultra Panavision; a camera and projection system that was



predominately used during the first years of Century 21 operation along with Super Panavision. In 1959, the Ultra Panavision 70 camera earned the Scientific and Engineering Award, and that year the first Super Panavision 70 feature, *The Big Fisherman*, was captured on 65mm film using spherical lenses with an aspect ratio of 2.20:1. The Ultra Panavision 70 technology led to new lenses that eliminated distortions created by early CinemaScope lenses common to the industry in the 1950s. With its superior technology and patented optical system, Panavision's lens became the industry standard for anamorphic production and helped earn Panavision nineteen Academy Awards in Technical Achievement. These engineering innovations continued through generations of lenses to provide the signature "Panavision look" that filmmakers have prized up to the present time.

While the Century 21 dome did not ultimately become a permanent home to three-projector Cinerama, the Ultra and Super Panavision systems brought wide-screen Cinerama movies to the residents of Santa Clara Valley. This period of transition was also occurring in Hollywood, where Pacific Theatre's Cinerama Dome at 6360 Sunset Blvd. was the first dome created for wide-screen movies. In operation about a year before Century 21 in San José, it also was designed for the three-projector system, but opened using Panavision. It was designated by the City of Los Angeles as a Historic – Cultural Monument in 1998.

### **SAN JOSE PRESERVATION ORDINANCE**

Pursuant to a request by the Department of Planning, Building, and Code Enforcement, as a part of this review, we considered the documentation prepared by Docomomo/NoCa for potential City Landmark eligibility using the City of San José landmark designation criteria, which is used to consider historical significance for properties within the San José city jurisdiction. The actual nomination process and decision by the San José City Council is based on the requirements of Chapter 13 of the San José Municipal Code (Section 13.48.110 / *Procedure for designation of a landmark*).

The property is not currently listed on the City of San José Historic Resources Inventory. The Inventory presently lists four other theaters as City Landmarks, one Candidate City Landmark, and one eligible for the National Register:

- California Fox Theater (HS85-29)
- Civic Auditorium (HL86-40)
- Jose Theater (HL91-53)
- Towne Theater (HL92-88)
- Center for the Performing Arts (CCL)
- Mayfair Theater (ENR)

An application has been filed by Gregory Davies of Cassidy Turley on behalf of owners Winchester Investments, LLC, (SP13-44) for demolition of the three theaters, Century 21, 22, and 23, on the larger site. The larger site is also under review for the issuance of a Certificate of Compliance (CT13-003) to certify the legality of parcels under the Century 21 Theater and Winchester Mystery House, and a Lot Line Adjustment (AT13-36) to transfer 1.97 acres between two lots on the larger 18.07 acres site.

On November 25, 2013, the San José Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) requested that the Century 21 Theater (3161 Olsen Dr.) and/or larger site that includes the former Bob's Big Boy

Restaurant (Flames Coffee Shop – 449 South Winchester Blvd.) be placed on a future agenda for initiation of City Landmark proceedings. At the January 9, 2014, meeting of the HLC, the Commission voted to initiate proceedings, and requested that staff obtain information from a qualified historian to use in considering the historic value of the building(s).

The County of Santa Clara Assessor currently lists the mailing address of Winchester Investments, LLC, as 150 Pelican Way, San Rafael, CA 94901 (the location of SyWest Development). The Secretary of State, however, lists the mailing address of Winchester Investments, LLC, with an entity address of 1515 The Alameda #200, San José, CA 95126 (Ray K. Farrus, II).

Based on the statement of integrity within the National Register nomination, and our own reconnaissance of the exterior of the building, and a review of historic photographs provided with the nomination, the property appears to have integrity to its period of significance. The period of significance is 1964, the year that the building was constructed.

The National Register nomination forms prepared by Docomomo/NoCa clearly presents information that describes the physical attributes of the building, its historic context, property development history, and significance under the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The forms (National Park Service (NPS) Form 10-900), are similar in content to the California Department of Parks and Recreation Form 523 (DPR523), that have been used in the recent past within the San José planning program to record properties for potential listing on the San José Historic Resources Inventory and as Candidate City Landmarks (CCL). The DPR523 recording forms were developed in 1995 to provide a standardized recording format for properties under consideration as historic resources, both locally and at the state level. However, many properties in California are recorded under NPS Form 10-900, including some currently listed on the San José Historic Resources Inventory. The City of San José requirements under Chapter 13 of the Municipal Code do not specify a format for submittal of information to support a nomination for review by the Historic Landmarks Commission and the San José City Council.

Nomination for City Historic Landmark status can be made by a property owner, or can be initiated by the San José City Council or Historic Landmarks Commission. The process includes a public hearing before the Historic Landmarks Commission, and following that hearing, a report with recommendations is then be submitted to the City Council, who will then hold a public hearing to formally consider the designation.

In order for the designation to take place, the San José City Council must make findings that the property has historical, architectural, cultural, aesthetic, or engineering interest or value of an historical nature, and that its designation as an individual City Landmark conforms to the goals and policies of the Envision San José 2040 General Plan.

*Under the Envision San José 2040 General Plan, historic sites and structures provide an educational link to San Jose's past and foster a sense of place and community identity for San José. The preservation of appropriate remnants of a city's past provides multiple benefits important to the health and progress of the city. Historical Resources:*

- *Are instructive, telling the story of a community's past;*
- *Provide a sense of civic identity and unique character;*
- *Are typically an interesting and pleasing aesthetic in the urban environment;*
- *Can generate economic advantage for a property or neighborhood;*



- *Give a community a sense of permanency. A place with a clear past can expect to also have a definite future;*
- *Once lost, cannot be recovered.*

Under Goal LU-13 – Landmarks and Districts *Preserve and enhance historic landmarks and districts in order to promote a greater sense of historic awareness and community identity and contribute toward a sense of place.*

Applicable General Plan Policies include:

- *LU-13.2 Preserve candidate or designated landmark buildings, structures and historic objects, with first priority given to preserving and rehabilitating them for their historic use, second to preserving and rehabilitating them for a new use, or third to rehabilitation and relocation on-site. If the City concurs that no other option is feasible, candidate or designated landmark structures should be rehabilitated and relocated to a new site in an appropriate way.*
- *LU-13.3 For landmark structures located within new development areas, incorporate the landmark structures within the new development as a means to create a sense of place, contribute to a vibrant economy, provide a connection to the past, and make more attractive employment, shopping, and residential areas.*
- *LU-13.6 Ensure modifications to candidate or designated landmark buildings or structures conform to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties and/or appropriate State of California requirements regarding historic buildings and/or structures, including the California Historical Building Code.*
- *LU-13.8 Require that new development, alterations, and rehabilitation/remodels adjacent to a designated or candidate landmark or Historic District be designed to be sensitive to its character.*
- *LU-13.13 Foster the rehabilitation of buildings, structures, areas, places, and districts of historic significance. Utilize incentives permitting flexibility as to their uses; transfer of development rights; tax relief for designated landmarks and districts; easements; alternative building code provisions for the reuse of historic structure; and financial incentives.*
- *LU-13.16 Alert property owners, land developers, and the building industry to historic preservation goals and policies and their implications early in the development process.*

## FINDINGS

**We believe that the necessary findings can be made for individual designation as a San José City Historic Landmark Structure, and that designation of the building conforms to the goals and policies of the Envision San José 2040 General Plan.**

Century 21 Theater is a distinctive example of mid-century Modern architecture in San José, and is uniquely representative of modern social, arts, and culture in the period following World War II that the City of San José has identified as the Industrialization and Suburbanization Period. The National Register nomination prepared by Docomomo/NoCa provides the necessary background information to support this finding, and we concur that the building is a significant historic resource and maintains its integrity to its period of significance.

In reviewing the possible historical values associated with the Century 21 Theater building located on the property at 3161 Olsen Dr., we consider the following statement applicable:

*The theater building at 3161 Olsen Dr., San José, has special historical, architectural and aesthetic interest and value to the community, for the distinctive design of the building, which is an extremely fine example of mid-century Modern architecture, and is representative of important local emerging social, arts and entertainment culture in San José during its period of Industrialization and Suburbanization.*

The City of San José could reasonably make the following findings in designating the Century 21 Theater building a city historic landmark:

- *It has character, interest and value as a part of local and regional history and heritage and culture, and is a distinctive building within the Valley Fair/Santana Row and Vicinity Urban Village planning area;*
- *It is the embodiment of elements of architectural design, detail, and craftsmanship which represents a significant architectural innovation in San José during the period of Industrialization and Suburbanization;*
- *It is the work of architect Vincent G. Raney, whose individual work has influenced the development of the City of San José;*
- *It exemplifies aspects of the social and cultural heritage of the San José within the theme of Social, Arts, and Recreation as a signature building that is recognizable within the context of the City as a whole as the first building of a new era of wide-screen cinema in San José;*
- *It portrays an era of modern architectural history that is embodied in the building's distinctive mid-century Modern architectural style and building type.*

Sincerely,



Franklin Maggi, Architectural Historian

Attachments (additional 1960s brochures and photos)



Premiere Performance Sponsored by Children's Home Society of California  
For ticket information call 736-2709 . . . 252-8949

**Gala Opening Tuesday, Nov. 24 at 8 p.m.**

**NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S MOST  
UNUSUAL AND LUXURIOUS THEATRE**

**CENTURY**  
**21** SAN JOSE  
296-0987

NEXT TO THE WINCHESTER  
MYSTERY HOUSE




**PRESENTS A NEW ERA IN ENTERTAINMENT**

"ONE OF THE YEARS' 10 BEST" *Bosley Crowther—N.Y. Times*  
STANLEY KRAMER presents in **"IT'S A MAD, MAD,  
MAD, MAD WORLD"**

**CINERAMA**  
TECHNICOLOR • RELEASED THRU UNITED ARTISTS

1. Newspaper advertisement at opening.

**CENTURY 21** Northern California's Most  
PRESENTS Luxurious Theatre



**CINERAMA**

NEXT TO WINCHESTER MYSTERY HOUSE • SAN JOSE • 296-0987

2. Ticket flyer.

## ***Century 24 to join Syufy's three other 'suburban roadshow' houses in San Jose***



*Syufy Enterprises' dome-shaped "suburban roadshow theatres," Century 21, 22 and 23, in San Jose, Calif., played to over 1 million patrons last year, are being joined by nearby Century 24. Each of the reserved seat houses has 10 performances weekly.*

**S**ERVING OVER 1 million patrons in 1967, Syufy Enterprises' circular-domed Century 21, 22 and 23 theatres, in San Jose, Calif., are being joined by another "suburban roadshow," the nearby Century 24.

The San Jose-Santa Clara area, which the theatres serve, has a population of about 1 million.

Greater listening and viewing enjoyment, equipment, widescreens, continental seating, "near perfect" acoustics, guaranteed reserved seats, shorter travel distances for suburbanites and ample parking are reported factors

contributing to success of the three Century roadshow theatres.

Century 21, 22 and 23 have 960 watt, six-channel magnetic sound systems designed and installed by Ampex Corp. Each of the eight amplifiers has a rating of 120 watts. Eleven high and low frequency speakers are located behind the stage and surrounding the audience. Each of the five speakers behind the stage can be controlled separately from the projection room. Surround speakers are tied into a single control.

Century 21's screen is formed by 2,000 vertical 3/4-inch ribbons, which make it capable of presenting Cinerama. The 940-seater can also present 35mm and 70mm films. The 832-seat Century 23 is equipped to handle all types of projection, including Cinerama and Dimension 150.

The three circular domed theatres regularly schedule 10 performances a week—including Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday matinees. Additional showings are provided for holidays and vacation seasons.

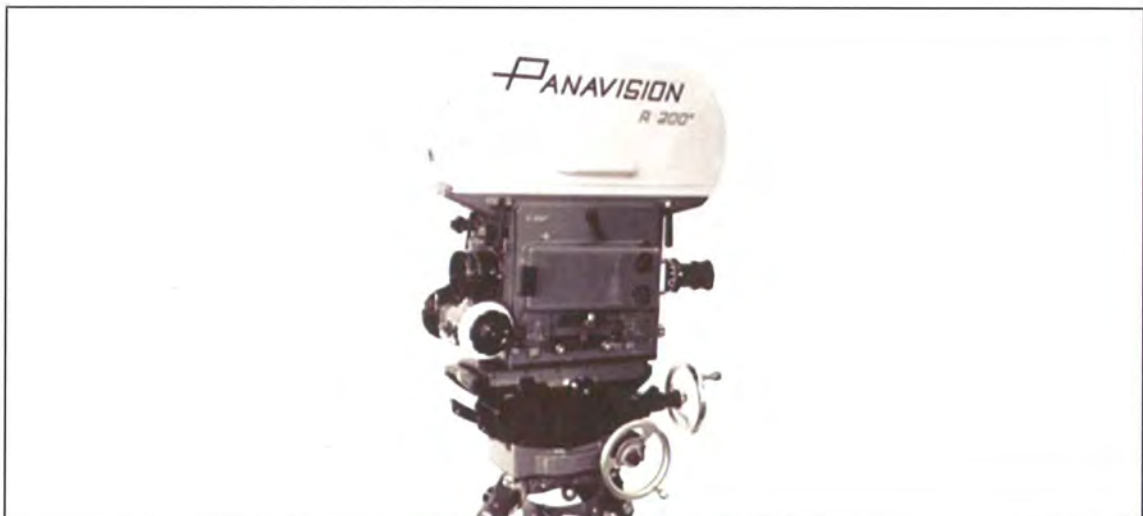


*Towering marquee identifies Century 21, 22 and 23 theatres, tells attractions in each of the "suburban roadshow" theatres in San Jose, Calif.*

### **3. 1967 Mercury News article on Century Theaters.**



4. Ca. 1965 photo of Century 21.



5. Ultra Panavision camera.



## Attachment F

January 10, 2014

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council of San Jose, CA:

I'm writing to you on behalf of my family, the Raney's and the Farris's, the property owners of the Century 21 Theater and Flames Restaurant (the former Bob's Big Boy). We are appealing to you to deny historic landmark status to the Century 21 (as well as the Flames building).

Our family has been in San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley since 1923 when our grandparents John and Mamie Brown moved onto the grounds of the Winchester Estate (now Winchester Mystery House). For over 90 years our family has been supportive of the City of San Jose, in part through our preservation of the Winchester Mystery House, a city, state, and national landmark, which we voluntarily registered. Our family, as individuals and as owners of The Mystery House, contributes to the City by providing jobs, payment of taxes, charitable donations and fundraising, in addition to attracting tourism to the area.

When asked of us, our family gave approximately 5 acres of our property for the widening of Winchester Blvd. We paid for improvements that benefited the city, moving Olin Ave and having Olsen Drive come through our property. We believe we have acted as good citizens in responding to the city and county's need for land and in preserving the Winchester Mystery House, a significant city landmark.

We ask that you consider the rights of private property owners in your deliberations, and take into account the donation already made of 5 acres of our land for public use. We believe that careful development of the lands on which the Century theaters and Flames restaurant sit will serve the current and future needs of the community. In accordance with San Jose's 2040 General Plan our property lies within a specifically selected Urban Village area. We envision a new life and new use for the property that would meet the city's growing needs for housing, jobs, and commerce; as well as needs for taxes and revenue that ultimately provide citizens with essential services.

We hope our family's 90 years of stewardship of the Mystery House demonstrates that we are not unsympathetic to the goals of preservation, but we believe that designating the Century 21 Theater a landmark would serve only a small percentage of the city's population. In fact it is possible preserving the Century 21 might not serve anyone at all if the goal of preserving it is to continue its use as a movie screening location. The Century 21 as a movie theater was wonderful in it's day; an example of new technologies that aimed to thrill moviegoers. But today moviemaking and viewing technology has changed, as well as the way in which people view movies have dramatically altered. Movies are increasingly no longer made on film, but are digitally produced, and thus movie theaters have to be completely retrofitted to digital projection, the cost of which can run into hundreds of thousands of dollars. The movie-viewing experience has changed with attendance



at movie theaters dramatically declining as people increasingly watch movies at home or while traveling, streaming them to digital devices like ipads and smart phones, and watching original programming in their living rooms from online distributors like Netflix.

These two trends in the movie industry make it increasingly difficult for newer multiplexes as well as independent theaters to be profitable or even to just survive. The argument that the Century 21 could "easily be retrofitted to show original Cinerama films, in addition to its regular programming" does not take into account these changes in movie attendance, which is on the decline, nor the expense required to retrofit 2 different viewing systems (Outdated Cinerama and Incoming digital projection). What further burdens the economic viability of maintaining a single large screen for viewing Cinerama programming is that there were only 45 American films made completely in 65/70 mm, the format screened as Cinerama. There were only a handful of travelogues actually filmed in the true Cinerama process. This limited number of films that could be screened does not support the economics of maintaining the Century 21 nor of asking us to bear the burden of the costs of retrofitting the building not only for movies, but also for structural safety, which due to its age, would certainly be required.

Due to all these changes in the industry, the single large screen movie theater is no longer financially viable. Does requiring the preservation of a structure whose primary purpose is outdated provide the best use of this land for the next 50 years and beyond? Or would a thoughtful development that provides housing, jobs, and commerce be the better long-term solution for this property and the community? We sincerely believe the latter to be the case.

A member of our family, Vincent Raney, was the architect of the Century 21. His design aesthetic had a modernist perspective, with a vision towards the future. He built buildings that served the needs of the communities in which his buildings were placed. He believed buildings have a life span and that as a community evolves, so should its architecture. He would think the Century 21 is ready for retirement, making way for something new that would serve the City's and community's needs now and into the future.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of 40 members of the Raney and Farris Families  
by Michelle Bevis  
Ph.D., M.A. Psychology  
B.A., Film Studies

## Attachment 2



COUNCIL AGENDA: 3/18/14  
ITEM: 4.5

# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND  
CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Historic Landmarks  
Commission

**SUBJECT:** CENTURY 21 THEATRE  
NATIONAL REGISTER  
NOMINATION

**DATE:** March 13, 2014

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** 1

### RECOMMENDATION

Consider the comments from the Historic Landmarks Commission in the Council's response to the State of California regarding the proposed nomination of the Century 21 Theatre (3161 Olsen Drive) for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

### OUTCOME

The City Council's comments on the proposed nomination of the Century 21 Theatre (3161 Olsen Drive) for listing on the National Register of Historic Places will be forwarded to the State of California Office of Historic Preservation and the State Historical Commission for their consideration and recommendation to the National Park Service regarding the Theatre's potential listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

### BACKGROUND

On February 14, 2014, the City of San José received a referral from the California Office of Historic Preservation to allow for the City to review and provide comments on the pending nomination of the Century 21 Theatre for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places is maintained by the National Park Service and is the federal government's official list of districts, sites, and buildings deemed worthy of preservation.

The City's Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) met on March 11, 2014, for the purpose of taking public testimony and providing comments to the City Council on whether or not, in its opinion, the Century 21 Theatre meets the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Staff provided the HLC with an independent third party analysis of the nomination materials that concluded that the Century 21 Theatre is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as an early and notable example of a Cinerama-type theatre designed by noted Bay Area architect Vincent G. Raney.

## ANALYSIS

### **Public Testimony**

Six members of the public gave testimony to the HLC regarding the proposed listing of the theatre on the National Register. Members of the public included a representative of the property owner, residents from the adjacent residential area to the west of the Theatre site, a member of the Preservation Action Council of San Jose and other local historic preservation advocates. A letter received at the meeting is attached.

- A representative of the property owners (Raney and Ferris families) indicated that the listing on the National Register is opposed by the property owners because the Theatre is no longer viable and its preservation will hinder the future redevelopment of the site as part of an Urban Village in accordance with the General Plan.
- Several speakers indicated that the building qualifies for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- A neighborhood resident indicated that the building should be preserved because it is the last of its kind and one of the most iconic buildings in West San Jose. It was designed by a famous architect.
- A representative of the Preservation Action Council indicated that the demolition of the building should only be done as a last resort because the Theatre building has the potential to be refurbished to a modern theatre or other type of entertainment venue in conjunction with the redevelopment of the site.
- A historic preservation advocate indicated that the building is an example of mid-century modern architecture that has a distinct shape and a number of building elements that in combination express a "new found optimism" consistent with mid-century modern architecture.

### **HLC Comments**

After consideration of the public testimony, the Historic Landmarks Commission (Commissioners Torres and Abatecola absent) made the following comments for City Council consideration:

- The Century 21 Theatre qualifies for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a good example of mid-century modern architecture, but the larger property should not be listed on the Register.
- It is the role of the Historic Landmarks Commission to consider whether a building meets the criteria for historic designation. This building should be preserved for future generations without consideration of the financial implications to the property owner.



HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL  
March 13, 2014  
SUBJECT: Century 21 Theatre  
Page 3

- There is an opportunity to integrate the Theatre as an entertainment venue into the plans for the future development of the site.
- The proximity of the Century 21 Theatre to the historic Winchester Mystery House creates a unique opportunity to link these two resources.

#### EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP

The City Council's comments will be transmitted to the State Office of Historic Preservation and State Historical Resources Commission. These comments are due at least fifteen days before the hearing of the State Historical Resources Commission meeting scheduled for April 22, 2014. Following that meeting, the State Commission will forward a recommendation to the National Park Service. Staff will keep the Council apprised of the status of this nomination throughout the process.

#### PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST

- ☐ **Criterion 1:** Requires Council action on the use of public funds equal to \$1,000,000 or greater. **(Required: Website Posting)**
- ☐ **Criterion 2:** Adoption of a new or revised policy that may have implications for public health, safety, quality of life, or financial/economic vitality of the City. **(Required: E-mail and Website Posting)**
- ☐ **Criterion 3:** Consideration of proposed changes to service delivery, programs, staffing that may have impacts to community services and have been identified by staff, Council or a Community group that requires special outreach. **(Required: E-mail, Website Posting, Community Meetings, Notice in appropriate newspapers)**

Although this item does not meet any of the above criteria, staff followed Council Policy 6-30: Public Outreach Policy. The public provided comments to the Historic Landmarks Commission on March 11, 2014, as discussed in this memorandum. The community will have an additional opportunity to comment on this item when it goes before City Council on March 18, 2014.

#### COORDINATION

This item has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office.

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL  
March 13, 2014  
SUBJECT: Century 21 Theatre  
Page 4

CEQA

Not a Project, File No. PP10-078, General Procedure and Policy Making.

/s/

DAVID SYKES, SECRETARY  
Historic Landmarks Commission

For more information please contact Laurel Prevetti, Assistant Director, at 408-535-7901.

Attachment: Letter

## Attachment G

March 11, 2014

To whom it may concern:

Attached is a copy of the original Use Permit for the Century Theaters.

On the last page of the attachments please see the date of February 19, 1964 as the date the Planning Commission passed and adopted the Use Permit for the Century 21 Theater. According to the Use Permit date The Century 21 Theater is over 50 years old.

The original to this copy is in possession of Ms. Daphna Woolfe:  
[dwoolfe@pvdsd.net](mailto:dwoolfe@pvdsd.net).

Thank you.



HOUSE PERMIT

COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA PLANNING COMMISSION  
170 West Hedding Street  
San Jose 10, California

HOUSE PERMIT

Applicant: WINCHESTER PROPERTIES, INC.

For: Theater

Location: Southern side of 61st Avenue between Winchester Blvd. and  
Harris Road Avenue.

Approval is recommended for use under the provisions of  
Article 17 of the zoning ordinance. This permit is made pursuant to the appli-  
cation on file in the office of the Planning Commission and is subject to  
the following conditions:

1. The Exhibit "A" attached hereto can have in part hereof

RECEIVED  
COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA  
PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Pursuant to Resolution No. 1035 of the County of Santa Clara Planning  
Commission, Santa Clara, California, passed and adopted on September 15, 1965.

John St. Hagg, Secretary  
County of Santa Clara Planning Commission

ACCEPTANCE

The undersigned understands and accepts this permit and the conditions there-  
of set forth, agrees to comply with all conditions of the permit, understands the  
failure to comply therewith will render the permit subject to revocation and  
acknowledges receipt of the copy of this permit.

1785

Winchester Properties, Inc.  
Signature of Permittee

This permit, subject to the conditions stated therein shall not be deemed to  
be approved by the Planning Commission until the condition of acceptance has  
been executed by the applicant and a copy thereof filed with the Secretary of  
the Planning Commission.

File No. S.P. 6512

County Land Development  
County Counsel







9A66.8

PHASE 1

CONDITIONS TO BE MET - prior to applying for a building permit 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11  
 prior to building complete inspection 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11  
 conditions to apply to all three streets 14, 15

1. Applicant must meet the requirements of the Department of Public Works with respect to street dedication on Olsen & Winchester street improvements on Olsen & Winchester street drainage survey of property, electrolleys, and other conditions set forth in Exhibit 'A' prior to applying for a building permit.
2. Ingress and egress locations to be limited to three 24" drives onto Olsen Drive, and be defined by curbs, bumper rails, planting area, or such similar manner, and shall not be located closer than 5' from the property line.
3. The number of off-street parking spaces to be provided shall be 200 minimum.
4. Parking area and driveway to be paved with asphalt paving or better.
5. Parking stalls shall be delineated by painted lines.
6. Traffic bumper guards, utility and time installed as indicated on approved plans.
7. A 4" to 6" high concrete curb shall be established between all landscaped areas and automobile traffic.
8. Areas to be landscaped as indicated on plans and be continuously maintained. (Landscaping along Olsen Drive shall be similar to that across the street.)
9. Water shall be provided to all landscaped areas and sprinkler systems installed in those areas as indicated on the approved plans.
10. No signs approved at this time.
11. Provide a 6" high softwood fence where indicated on the approved plans.
12. Requirements of County Health Department:
  - a. Connect to sanitary sewer.
  - b. Review of plans by plans.
13. Onsite lighting shall be designed, controlled and maintained so that no light source is visible from off the property.
14. Garbage collection shall be conducted only during daylight hours.
15. Applicant shall have sufficient garbage containers available at all times to accommodate all trash.



1. All work must meet the standards of the Department of Public Works for the street, to include location, street improvements, storm drainage, and use of property.
2. The use of express roadways to be limited to 50' and be defined by curb cut, bumper rail, planting area, or such similar manner and shall not be located closer than 5' from the property line.
3. The number of off-street parking spaces to be provided shall be as per plan.
4. Backing area and driveways to be paved with asphalt paving, to be maintained.
5. Signs to be stationary and have no flashing or moving lights.
6. There shall be no banners, pennants, flags, spinners, or any such other advertising device displayed at any time.
7. The use of plantings as indicated on plans.
8. The use of landscaping as indicated and be continuously maintained.
9. Countdown shall be provided at the intersection of Planning Commission and shall be provided at the number provided by the Planning Commission.
10. Street crosswalks to be planted 50' from center along new street within developed portion of property.
11. Minimum landscaped strip shall be provided along property line of new street between back of sidewalk and parking.
12. The number of freestanding signs approved is one 12' x 30' - 360 square feet and located as indicated on approved plans.
13. All parking spaces and area for driveway shall meet County standards for landscaping within 10' of parking area. (Areas not fully utilized for parking spaces or access shall be landscaped.)
14. All landscaped areas shall be bordered by sidewalks or minimum 4" high concrete curbing or some similar manner.
15. Westerly 25' shall be landscaped as indicated on plans.
16. Provide traffic bumpers along parking stalls adjacent and along new street.
17. Reconstruct and improve 100' right of way at intersection and out to Winchester Boulevard and deceleration and acceleration lanes to Department of Public Works standards.
18. Construct a 6" high concrete wall along the entire westerly property line 10' from the front property line of the new street. Should a wall be constructed within the first 70' the maximum height shall be 3 feet.
19. All exterior lighting fixtures shall be designed, constructed and maintained so that no light source shall be visible from off the property covered by the use permit application.

File No. 100-1000 Winchester Properties, Inc.







January 10, 2014

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council of San Jose, CA:

I'm writing to you on behalf of my family, the Raney's and the Farris's, the property owners of the Century 21 Theater and Flames Restaurant (the former Bob's Big Boy). We are appealing to you to deny historic landmark status to the Century 21 (as well as the Flames building).

Our family has been in San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley since 1923 when our grandparents John and Mamie Brown moved onto the grounds of the Winchester Estate (now Winchester Mystery House). For over 90 years our family has been supportive of the City of San Jose, in part through our preservation of the Winchester Mystery House, a city, state, and national landmark, which we voluntarily registered. Our family, as individuals and as owners of The Mystery House, contributes to the City by providing jobs, payment of taxes, charitable donations and fundraising, in addition to attracting tourism to the area.

When asked of us, our family gave approximately 5 acres of our property for the widening of Winchester Blvd. We paid for improvements that benefited the city, moving Olin Ave and having Olsen Drive come through our property. We believe we have acted as good citizens in responding to the city and county's need for land and in preserving the Winchester Mystery House, a significant city landmark.

We ask that you consider the rights of private property owners in your deliberations, and take into account the donation already made of 5 acres of our land for public use. We believe that careful development of the lands on which the Century theaters and Flames restaurant sit will serve the current and future needs of the community. In accordance with San Jose's 2040 General Plan our property lies within a specifically selected Urban Village area. We envision a new life and new use for the property that would meet the city's growing needs for housing, jobs, and commerce; as well as needs for taxes and revenue that ultimately provide citizens with essential services.

We hope our family's 90 years of stewardship of the Mystery House demonstrates that we are not unsympathetic to the goals of preservation, but we believe that designating the Century 21 Theater a landmark would serve only a small percentage of the city's population. In fact it is possible preserving the Century 21 might not serve anyone at all if the goal of preserving it is to continue its use as a movie screening location. The Century 21 as a movie theater was wonderful in it's day; an example of new technologies that aimed to thrill moviegoers. But today moviemaking and viewing technology has changed, as well as the way in which people view movies have dramatically altered. Movies are increasingly no longer made on film, but are digitally produced, and thus movie theaters have to be completely retrofitted to digital projection, the cost of which can run into hundreds of thousands of dollars. The movie-viewing experience has changed with attendance



at movie theaters dramatically declining as people increasingly watch movies at home or while traveling, streaming them to digital devices like ipads and smart phones, and watching original programming in their living rooms from online distributors like Netflix.

These two trends in the movie industry make it increasingly difficult for newer multiplexes as well as independent theaters to be profitable or even to just survive. The argument that the Century 21 could "easily be retrofitted to show original Cinerama films, in addition to its regular programming" does not take into account these changes in movie attendance, which is on the decline, nor the expense required to retrofit 2 different viewing systems (Outdated Cinerama and Incoming digital projection). What further burdens the economic viability of maintaining a single large screen for viewing Cinerama programming is that there were only 45 American films made completely in 65/70 mm, the format screened as Cinerama. There were only a handful of travelogues actually filmed in the true Cinerama process. This limited number of films that could be screened does not support the economics of maintaining the Century 21 nor of asking us to bear the burden of the costs of retrofitting the building not only for movies, but also for structural safety, which due to its age, would certainly be required.

Due to all these changes in the industry, the single large screen movie theater is no longer financially viable. Does requiring the preservation of a structure whose primary purpose is outdated provide the best use of this land for the next 50 years and beyond? Or would a thoughtful development that provides housing, jobs, and commerce be the better long-term solution for this property and the community? We sincerely believe the latter to be the case.

A member of our family, Vincent Raney, was the architect of the Century 21. His design aesthetic had a modernist perspective, with a vision towards the future. He built buildings that served the needs of the communities in which his buildings were placed. He believed buildings have a life span and that as a community evolves, so should its architecture. He would think the Century 21 is ready for retirement, making way for something new that would serve the City's and community's needs now and into the future.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of 40 members of the Raney and Farris Families  
by Michelle Bevis  
Ph.D., M.A. Psychology  
B.A., Film Studies

**August 30, 2013**

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Raney and Farris Families. As the property owners, we wish to state our objection to the petition for registration of the Century 21 Theater in San Jose on the National Register of Historic Places. There are a number of reasons for our objection, which will be outlined within several contexts below.

**Historic Context-Raney and Farris Families:** Our family first arrived in the Santa Clara Valley in 1923 when John and Mamie Brown (our grandparents, great grandparents, and great-great grandparents) came to San Jose with their two daughters, Edna and Mildred. John Brown was a self-taught engineer and inventor who developed one of the earliest known roller-coasters, the Backety-Back Scenic Railway, for which he held a number of patents, including the unique track reversal design. John Brown had a partner with whom he wanted to build an amusement park, a popular pastime for people of the era. With the idea of finding a place for such a park, it came to be that John fell in love with the beautiful Victorian house on the Winchester Estate, whose owner was recently deceased without leaving the house to an heir. Inspired by his dream as well as his love of the rambling house, John and Mamie managed to move their family onto the Winchester Estate in the spring of 1923, first leasing the property from the bank that held the deed after an investor named Marsten had lost the property by defaulting on a blanket mortgage debt. The arrangement with the bank included an option to buy the property in exchange for paying off the debt. There were tough times when they thought they wouldn't make it and might lose the property, but John and Mamie were finally able to pay the debt and buy the house in 1933, after toiling for 10 years to do so. Mamie said that they "paid for it twice;" 10 years of leasing and then buying it outright. Their plans to develop an amusement park never came to fruition, as their partner had backed out and the city of San Jose said they were too far from downtown to develop a park. John and Mamie's daughter Edna recalled that it was Mamie's Bridge group that first suggested opening up the house to all the people who were interested in seeing the magnificent but unusual Victorian. John and Mamie assumed this interest in the house would be of short duration, but over the ensuing decades, the Winchester "Mystery" House grew as an attraction to visitors curious about the unique structure and the story of the woman who built it. Over the years, John and Mamie greeted all who came, guiding them through the labyrinthine home.

Time passed, and the Brown girls grew up, Edna marrying San Francisco architect Vincent G. Raney in 1936, and Mildred marrying businessman Ray Farris, Sr. in 1937. John Brown passed away in 1945, and Mamie followed in 1952, stipulating in her will to "share and share alike" amongst her 4 grandchildren, having transferred the Mystery House and surrounding property to Edna and Mildred after John's death.

As a result of our grandfather John Brown's unfulfilled dream, our family unexpectedly became the caretakers and guardians of this unique home with its enduring story, and eventually it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and became California Historical Landmark #868, as well as being designated an historical landmark in the city of San Jose. As a family we take our guardianship seriously (90 years and counting in 2013), wanting to preserve this piece of history not only for our family, now in it's 5<sup>th</sup> generation in Santa Clara County and California, but for all the coming generations of those who may be interested in Sarah Winchester's home, story and place in San Jose history.

**Historic Context: Development of the Century Theaters.** The land adjacent to the Winchester Mystery House which John and Mamie bequeathed to their daughters was undeveloped farmland for much of the time that Edna and Mildred lived at the Mystery House. With Mamie's passing, Edna and Mildred, along with their husbands Vincent Raney and Ray Farris, became the next generation to steward the beloved property their parents had entrusted to them. With an eye to the future, architect Vincent Raney had a



vision of putting the lands that no longer functioned well as farmland to new use. He had worked with Raymond "Ray" Syufy beginning in the 1940's. Supposedly Ray and his father had a large warehouse in Vallejo that they weren't sure what to do with. Family lore says that Vincent (already designing theaters) told Ray, "Why don't you turn it into a theater?" and a decades long partnership was born. Eventually Vincent brought in Syufy to put theaters on the lands next to the Mystery House, and in 1964 Century 21 Theater was opened to the public, followed by Century 22 and 23. While Century 21 was originally conceptualized to show films in the widescreen format of Cinerama, utilizing a 3-projector system, it never did screen a film in Cinerama, as it was an impractical format with many drawbacks, and a single projector was installed from the start.

**Architectural Context:** Vincent Raney had a modernist perspective on design, as well as the vision for creating buildings that addressed the functional and cultural needs of a rapidly growing post-war economy. He designed colleges and churches, service stations, shopping centers, industrial buildings and movie theaters among other things, to address the various needs of the developing communities in which his buildings were placed. When one of Vincent's grandchildren asked him where he got the idea for a domed theater, he replied that it was not original, and cited many examples of architectural use of domes dating back hundreds of years. As the petitioner cited in Section 8, page 7 of his petition, the Century 21 was "Likely inspired by the recently completed Cinerama Dome in Hollywood (completed in 1963)," and Vincent received the plans for a domed theater from the Cinerama company in 1963, which he used as a guideline for the Century 21, and then many other domed theaters that followed. The Century 21 was not the first domed theater, nor is it the last, neither in the country, state nor even in San Jose. Given that there exist other examples of domed theaters, the Century 21 is not significant as a structure of "exceptional importance." The argument of it being notable because of being built for Cinerama (3 projector format) does not seem adequate, as it was never actually used for Cinerama, only screening films with a single projector as every other theater did. Vincent Raney's perspective included an understanding of a changing world and the attendant changing needs of a community. When one of his theaters in Hawaii was torn down to be replaced by a shopping center he was not concerned, believing that the theater had served a purpose, and that new times called for new ideas. He would most certainly feel the same way about the Century 21; it had a useful life-span, but as the original farm-lands gave way to the construction of the Century theaters, he would support the theaters giving way to a new design and new buildings that would support and serve the evolving community needs.

**Movie Business Context:** The original use of theaters in the East as home to Vaudeville acts gave way in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the growing film industry, which eventually replaced live acts with the projected film medium (\*see attached reference list). In the West, the post-war expansion era included an increased demand for entertainment, which the construction of new movie theaters helped to fulfill. For decades the theater business grew, meeting the demands of the consumer for film entertainment, evolving from the single-theater structure, to the common multiplexes of today. The current evolution of the film distribution system is changing along two distinct lines that impact the economic viability of all movie theaters, but specifically in this case, the Century 21 theater. First are the ever increasing options for entertainment, including DVD's, on-demand viewing, use of internet streaming of movies for home use on computers, TV's, tablets and smart phones. As a result, there has been a sharp decrease in attendance at theaters as more people choose their entertainment on their own time in their own homes, or as they travel (\*). The Century 21 Theater reflects this dramatic drop in attendance, as the theater is often practically empty during movie screenings, especially because of the option to go to the newer CineArts multiplex right across the street. The second, and most immediately important development to the economic viability of movie theaters, including the Century 21 Theater, is the imminent obsolescence of 35-millimeter film projection, which is giving way to digital projection (\*). The cost to convert a theater from film projection to digital projection is estimated to run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars (\*). With this new age of at home movie screenings, digitally projected movies replacing film, and competition from more contemporary theaters, such as the CineArts multiplex across the street in Santana Row, the Century 21 theater has become obsolete.

**Summary:** The Raney and Farris families, 5<sup>th</sup> generation residents of the Santa Clara Valley, the greater Bay Area and California, have long supported historic preservation where warranted. We bear the responsibility of supporting and maintaining, both physically and economically, the Winchester Mystery House, a local, state and national landmark, which our family voluntarily registered. Our responsibility extends not only to the maintenance of the actual structure of the house itself, but we also have the responsibility to maintain the economic viability of this attraction. As a business, the Mystery House supports the local economy by providing a number of permanent and part time jobs, as well as by attracting visitors from around the world to the San Jose area who spend their dollars on dining, lodging and other entertainment. Additionally, the Mystery House contributes to the community through payment of taxes and contributions to various charities. Requiring our family to take on the added responsibility of yet another building to preserve would place a burden on us that would inevitably impact our ability to continue to preserve the Winchester Mystery House. We believe we have acted as good citizens by maintaining this significant San Jose landmark, and we wish to continue in our preservation of the Mystery House for future generations to enjoy.

We understand the nostalgia that the Century 21 Theater evokes in people. We share in that feeling of a by-gone era, having had our own experiences at and connection to the theater, but we don't believe the theater on its own represents a significant architectural or cultural place warranting inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The architect of the theater, Vincent Raney, was a member of our family, and he would not think it warranted inclusion. We believe the theater has had a long and wonderful life span, but that the life span for this theater has passed. As Vincent had done in the 1960's with the Century 21 theater, responding to the culture of the time by creating a modern use for the agricultural lands, we in turn are envisioning a new use and new life for this land that would benefit the city of San Jose and the county of Santa Clara, as well as would allow our family to focus on and continue to support the legacy and preservation of the Winchester Mystery House. For all of the above reasons, we respectfully request that this petition for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places be denied.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Raney and Farris families by Michelle Bevis, Ph.D.  
Great-granddaughter of John and Mamie Brown, granddaughter of Vincent and Edna Raney

This letter is approved by the following owners of Century 21. Since they are located all over California, it is necessary to sign separately. We intend to have each signatory notarize her/his signature.

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Gerard E. Raney

---

Raney Children Trust

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Lisa Raney Toland

---

Julie Raney Vance

---

Brendan Maxwell Raney



---

Elizabeth Raney Bevis Fritsch

---

Michelle Bevis

---

P. Antony Fritsch

---

Westwind Entprises, LTD

---

M. Valerie Bovone

---

Mary V. Bovone Annuity Trust

---

Karen Bovone

---

Nancy Brightman

---

John Bovone

---

Christopher Bovone

---

Suzanne Smith

---

Laurie Jaquez

---

Jill Bovone

---

Ray Farris, II

---

Shannon L. Cronan

---

Eastwind, LLC

---

Mason Boswell 2006 Trust

---

Dylan Boswell 2006 Trust

---

Aaron Boswell 2006 Trust

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Zachary Brightman 2006 Trust

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Sabrina Brightman 2006 Trust

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Jack Bovone 2006 Trust

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Nathan Bovone 2006 Trust

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Gavin Bovone 2006 Trust

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Giavanna Ray Bovone 2006 Trust

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Luca Bovona 2006 Trust

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Ryder Jaquez 2007 Trust

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Max Jawuez 2007 Trust

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Jacoby Smith 2008 Trust

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Kennedy Jaquez 2009 Trust

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Natalia Bovone 2010 Trust

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Joley Smith 2010 Trust



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Harper Valerie Hyland 2010 Trust

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Ainsley Kim Hyland 2012 Trust

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R & M Farris Irrevocable Trust

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Farris Children Irrevocable Trust

## References

The last of the area's small theaters struggle to survive as Hollywood phases out 35-millimeter film for digital projection; [http://www.ydr.com/local/ci\\_23139035/last-reel-movie-industrys-switch-digital-hits-theaters](http://www.ydr.com/local/ci_23139035/last-reel-movie-industrys-switch-digital-hits-theaters)

Are Americans falling out of love with Hollywood? Cinema attendance plummets to a 25 year low; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2178341/Hollywood-Cinema-attendance-plummets-25-year-low.html>

Movie theaters to spend big bucks to convert from film to digital;  
<http://www.wfsb.com/story/23271729/movie-theaters-to-spend-big-bucks-to-convert-from-film-to-digital>

Switch to digital projectors imperils some theaters;  
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/09/30/digital-projector-costs-imperil-theaters/1600439/>

Theater owners weigh film perfection, conversion costs;  
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2013/02/22/digital-theater-movies/1940067/>

Small movie houses struggle with switch to digital;  
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/07/23/digital-films-theaters/2580353/>



## Movie theaters to spend big bucks to convert from film to digital

Posted: Aug 27, 2013 4:19 PM PDT

Updated: Sep 24, 2013 4:25 PM PDT

By Courtney Zieller - email

HARTFORD, CT (WFSB) - Actual film strips are going to be a thing of the past, thanks to modern technology. All movie theaters, big or small, have to make the digital switch, and that's not cheap to do.

Many of these smaller theaters are feeling the crunch as they need to make the switch from film to digital.

Eyewitness News visited Real Art Ways, which is a Hartford nonprofit that's still running films and trying to deal with the transition.

"Film is going to be over. There will be no more film," said LB Muñoz of Real Art Ways in Hartford. "This year, the people who are making the film will no longer be making it, so everything has to be digital."

Muñoz said all theaters need to make the switch sooner rather than later and it's a long and expensive process.

"Completely renovating our theaters, changing out our booths, pulling out all of our 35mm projectors and bringing in the new technology," Muñoz said.

Converting film to digital is expensive. It's going to cost this theater about \$100,000. While the staff at Real Art Ways have some of the money ☑, they still need a lot more.

"We are up against a time constraint because if we don't do it immediately, we are going to lose the ability to show film," Muñoz said.

The staff at Real Art Ways said they still need about \$75,000 to make the conversion and now they're up against the clock.

Real Art Ways just has one screen to convert, but for theaters with multiple screens, that process can rack up hundreds of thousands of dollars in bills.

National theater chains, including National Amusements, told Eyewitness News they upgraded their systems and made a deal with Sony to cover the costs.

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### In The News

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Homeowners Are In For A Big Surprise...  
Smart Life Weekly



Winter storm watches posted for parts of Connecticut

# Switch to digital projectors imperils some theaters

Judy Keen, USA TODAY 7:22 a.m. EDT September 30, 2012



(Photo: George LeClaire, AP)

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51  
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(<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://usat.ly/QCV4gL&text=Switch%20to%20digital%20p>

Hollywood's switch from 35-millimeter film to digital movies is imperiling some small theaters that can't afford the new projectors.

"We're faced with digital doomsday," says Jason Clark, owner of Parkhill Cinema, a three-screen theater in Tarboro, N.C. He's been told he needs to install three new digital projectors that cost \$50,000 to \$70,000 each by the end of 2013.

"It's crunch time," says Clark, who hopes local residents and businesses in the town of 11,000 will help him raise the money. "It's an uphill battle," he says. "We're hoping the community will rally around us."

The move to digital movies has been in the works for a decade, says John Filthian, president of the National Association of Theatre Owners. As of last week, 31,135 of the nation's 39,908 movie auditoriums, or about 78%, had made the transition to digital projectors, he says.

Digital movies are higher quality than those on film and are cheaper for movie studios to produce and distribute, Filthian says. Some theaters are financing the conversion through third-party groups that pick up the tab and are reimbursed by theater owners and through fees paid by movie studios.

Because theaters must meet certain profit levels, it can be difficult for owners of small movie houses with low profits to qualify.

"Film will end very soon as a distribution mechanism," Filthian says. "We're pushing every way possible to get everybody equipped (with digital projectors) but they won't all make it."

-- Ray Welch, manager of the four-screen Florence Cinemas in Florence, Ore., says the theaters will close if he can't find a way to raise \$250,000 for the conversion. "We don't have the profit margin to support this," he says. "We need some sort of help."

-- Joe Smith, owner of Princess Theaters in Mayfield, Ky., used all his savings to buy the two-screen theater seven years ago. He hopes to save some money by buying used digital projectors. A local steakhouse held a fundraising lunch to support the theater and he's hoping for more community help so he doesn't have to sell his collection of old movies on film.

"It really keeps me up at night sometimes worrying about whether we can survive," Smith says.

-- When Michelle Haugerud, owner of the JEM Movie Theatre in Harmony, Minn., got a \$100,000 price quote from a projector company in the summer of 2011, her immediate reaction was, "Well, we'll just go out of business," she says. "Our revenue wasn't high enough to ask the bank for a loan."

Instead, many of the community's 1,000 residents pitched in and helped raise \$40,000 through greeting card sales, a football night at the theater and other events. Haugerud found a used projector for \$55,000.

Business is still slow because of the economy, she says, but picture quality "has improved greatly" with the new technology. "I'll keep running the theater as long as I can," she says.

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51  
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(<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://usat.ly/QCV4gL&text=Switch%20to%20digital%20projectors%20imperils%20some%20theate>





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## HOW MANY FILMS WERE SHOT IN CINERAMA?

Replies: 7 - Pages: 1 - Original Post: Feb 12, 2012 8:00 PM Original Post By: slaytonf

Izcutter

Posts: 12,725  
Registered: 02/06/05

Re: How many films were shot in Cinerama?

Posted: Feb 18, 2012 12:41 PM [In response to: kriegerg69](#)

*I believe the original question meant how many films were actually made in the true Cinerama three-panel process. It's well-known (and accepted) that any other films shot in 70mm but presented as "Cinerama" were not TRUE Cinerama movies.*

It wasn't my intention to imply that the 70mm films were true Cinerama movies. That's why I included the caveat that they were shot in 70mm but presented in Cinerama.

And I tried to keep them separate from the films that were true Cinerama films.

My apologies for any confusion I may have caused.

slaytonf

Posts: 3,438  
Registered: 11/12/10

Re: How many films were shot in Cinerama?

Posted: Feb 18, 2012 10:49 AM [In response to: slaytonf](#)

And let's not neglect to mention the Soviets (in their "me, too" mode) developed their own three strip projection system, Kinopanorama:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinopanorama>  
(No doubt incalculably superior to the capitalist imperialist decadent product.)

kriegerg69

Posts: 2,450  
Registered: 12/27/02

Re: How many films were shot in Cinerama?

Posted: Feb 17, 2012 11:47 PM [In response to: Izcutter](#)

I believe the original question meant how many films were actually made in the true Cinerama three-panel process. It's well-known (and accepted) that any other films shot in 70mm but presented as "Cinerama" were not TRUE Cinerama movies.

Which would mean ONLY these films were true Cinerama (and even two of them are questionable):

1952 *This is Cinerama* 3-Strip Cinerama; re-released in 1972 in 70 mm Cinerama  
1955 *Cinerama Holiday* 3-Strip Cinerama  
1956 *Seven Wonders of the World* 3-Strip Cinerama  
1957 *Search for Paradise* 3-Strip Cinerama  
1958 *South Seas Adventure* 3-Strip Cinerama  
*Windjammer* originally filmed in 3-strip Cinemiracle, later exhibited in Cinerama  
1962 *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* 3-Strip Cinerama  
*Holiday in Spain* a re-edited version of *Scent of Mystery*, originally filmed in Todd-70; converted to 3-strip Cinemiracle and exhibited in both Cinemiracle and Cinerama  
*How The West Was Won* 3-strip Cinerama, although some sequences were filmed in Ultra Panavision 70  
1963 *The Best of Cinerama* 3-Strip Cinerama

ValentineXavier

Posts: 6,669  
Registered: 10/20/09

Re: How many films were shot in Cinerama?

Posted: Feb 13, 2012 3:05 AM [In response to: slaytonf](#)

General Discussions  
Messages: 350,610  
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## Movie Attendance Likely To Drop In 2013, And Beyond: Report

By DAVID LIEBERMAN Tuesday April 9, 2013 @ 10:21am PDT



Bond analysis firm Fitch Ratings offers its bracing analysis of the movie exhibition industry a week ahead of theater owners' annual CinemaCon trade show in Las Vegas. The company forecasts a "modest" decline in 2013 ticket sales and long-term challenges that should "cause concern" for lenders. Studios will find it "difficult to replicate" the success they had last year with hits including *The Avengers* and *The Dark Knight Rises*,

analysts Shawn Gannon, Rolando Larrondo and Mike Simonton conclude. In addition the 3D market is "starting to mature." Consumers "are focused again on the overall quality of the film and are weighing the cost of a premium ticket versus a base 2D ticket." A drop in 3D sales might offset an expected low-single-digit increase in ticket prices. Fitch also expects concession revenues to be flat, with the drop in attendance wiping out price increases, although ad sales should improve. Long term, the analysts say that they're concerned about improvements in home video and increased piracy, as well as rising ticket prices. Over the next several years "patrons may become more selective in the films they view at the theaters versus those they are willing to view at home." Any drop in revenues could hurt because "many operators maintain high debt levels, combined with fairly high levels of capital expenditures" to keep their equipment and facilities up to date.

## Are Americans falling out of love with Hollywood? Cinema attendance plummets to 25-year low

- Ticket prices steadily rising while cinema attendance drops to worst it's been since 1995
- Audiences choosing against higher-priced 3-D films as well

By [Beth Stebner](#)

PUBLISHED: 12:19 EST, 24 July 2012 | UPDATED: 14:19 EST, 24 July 2012



[38](#)

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The golden age of the silver screen may be coming to a close.

Attendance at movie theatres is at a 25-year low, with young consumers – those who often see the most films – down 40 per cent since 2002.

In addition, viewers are turning away from 3-D films, which allowed movie theatre to charge more, according to a shocking new report.





© Corbis

**Lonely screenings: Attendance at movie theatres is at a 25-year low, with young consumers & those who often see the most films & down 40 per cent since 2002**

The report, by Goldman Sachs analysts Drew Borst and Fred Krom initiated coverage of movie theatre chains Cinemark Holdings Inc. and Regal Entertainment Group, saying that demand in the U.S. has steadily contracted as options for home entertainment improved and that attendance per person hit a 25-year low in 2011.

With more options than ever, viewers may not feel the need to spend money to drive to the theatre, buy a ticket, and supplement that ticket cost with concessions.

Similarly, consumers have many more home entertainment choices, from DVDs and movies-on-demand to streaming internet services.

Also, the amount of time between when a movie is released in the theatre and released for home video has shrunk by one-third since 2002, the analysts' research report notes.

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BUSINESS

# Chiller theater: Movie attendance sinks to 1995 level

By Claire Atkinson

July 24, 2012 | 4:00am

Hollywood's financial future is scarier than anything shown on the big screen.

Attendance at the movies last year was the lowest since 1995, and per-person attendance fell to a 25-year low — in particular among younger consumers who frequent the cinema most often, a new report shows.

More home entertainment options, better gadgetry and a shrinking theatrical-release window were among the reasons given by Goldman Sachs analysts Drew Borst and Fred Krom.

Even more frightening, rising ticket prices — the lone driver of box-office revenue growth for the past decade — may be slowing as fans opt out of higher-priced formats such as 3D. Since January, 3D ticket sales have dropped from 45 percent to 34 percent of the box office.

"An ongoing decline in the popularity of 3D would be a headwind on average prices and the overall box office."

Back in 2002, the average moviegoer went to the theater eight times a year; last year, it was fewer than six. In particular, younger viewers are going to movies less often. Attendance per person for consumers ages 12 to 24 is down 40 percent since 2002.

"As far as teens go, they are just becoming more savvy, it takes more effort to get them," said Phil Contrino of Boxoffice.com.

While attendance has been steadily declining for a decade, 2011 was a particularly challenging year even though the US box-office broke the \$10 billion mark.

Analysts predict that this year, with blockbusters including "The Hunger Games," "The Avengers" and "The Dark Knight Rises," will be an improvement over last year. Contrino pointed out that the final "Twilight" installment and "The Hobbit" are yet to come.

So far this year, the box office has taken in \$6.1 billion with Warner Bros.' "Dark Knight" recording \$161 million on its opening weekend despite the shooting in Colorado during a midnight showing.

"All the films were affected this weekend," said Jeff Bock, senior analyst at Exhibitor Relations. He said "Ice Age" was down 56 percent in its second week, while the theater shooting cost the "Dark Knight" around \$15 million to \$20 million in ticket sales.

# Page Six

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# Planning Department

Jfredericks@colliers.com

Wed 4/9/2014 5:18 PM

To: Toomians, Kristinae <kristinae.toomians@sanjoseca.gov>;

Public Comments

Folder Number: 2014 011881 AO

Project Manager: Kristinae Toomians

The domes on Winchester Boulevard are an eyesore at best and while "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", I am amazed that anyone would think that the Century Theatres are any sort of historical landmark. Pretty much anything that would get built on this site, from residential to retail to a school to office product, would be a significant improvement and would vastly improve the curb appeal of this site. I am not a neighbor, I have no vested interest one way or the other, and I really do not care what is or isn't done with the site. Often, these sorts of things take on a life of their own, without responses that represent the alternate (and often majority) point of view. So now you have one. Thank you.

Name: Jeff Fredericks

Email: Jfredericks@colliers.com

Telephone Number: 408-605-1521

Web Server: [www.sjpermits.org](http://www.sjpermits.org)

Client Information: Mozilla/5.0 (Windows NT 6.1; WOW64; Trident/7.0; rv:11.0) like Gecko

HL14-212

GANASANCHEZ@comcast.net

Tue 4/22/2014 4:37 PM

To: Toomians, Kristinae <kristinae.toomians@sanjoseca.gov>;

Ms Toomians

Received the notice of the Century 21 Theatre landmark designation. I've lived in SJ for more than 65 years, but I feel the theatre holds no significant public interest in being maintained or restored in its current form. As a theatre complex it is obsolete. It is an architectural eyesore. I've seen photos of Europe from my daughter's trips, those preserved buildings have history and distinct style, the theatre comparison is laughable. San Jose, its residents and visitors, deserve better.

Thank you,  
Mr Gornall  
473 S Henry Ave, SJ



# The Century 21 Theater

Stan Soles <stansoles@sbcglobal.net>

Thu 4/24/2014 6:51 PM

To: Toomians, Kristinae <kristinae.toomians@sanjoseca.gov>;

Stan Soles  
463 Rosewood Ave  
San Jose, CA 95117  
April 24, 2014

Dear Ms. Toomians:

I am sending this email asking you to recommend that the City Council vote to grant Historic Landmark Designation for The Century 21 Theater. I believe The Century 21 Theater building to be the very icon of the City of San Jose and I think it would be a shame to lose this cool old theater.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration on this matter.

Yours Sincerely,

Stan Soles



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356 Santana Row, Suite 1005  
San Jose, CA 95128  
PH: 408.551.4600  
FX: 408.551.4616

May 5, 2014

Historic Landmarks Commission  
Attention: Steven Cohen, Chair  
and Members of the Commission  
City of San Jose  
200 E. Santa Clara Street  
San Jose, CA 95113

Re: Agenda Item 3A, May 7, 2014 Meeting  
Designation of Century 21 Theater as City Landmark

Dear Chair Cohen and Members of the Commission:

This letter is written on behalf of SR Winchester, LLC, a Delaware Limited Liability Company, which is under contract with the owners of the Century Theatres site to occupy and develop the site.

We believe that it is premature for the Historic Landmarks Commission to make any recommendation regarding the Century 21 building (the "Building") at this time. There is no development application on file with the City, and no proposal has been made for the ultimate configuration of the site. Since longstanding San Jose Policy has been not to allow demolition of any structures except in connection with the approval of an alternative development, there appears to be no actual urgency regarding the designation of the Building.

The premature nature of the request is evidenced in part by the historical report's analysis that the applicable "period of significance" is the year 1964. This year is not a "period" but happens to be the year that the Building was constructed, and, by happenstance, exactly 50 years ago – which illustrates the hurried nature of this request.

We also note that the determination of eligibility for the National Register that was recently made by the California Historic Resources Commission completely ignored the testimony of the representative of the owner, which was presented in great detail to the Commission (and a part of which is included in writing in the City's Staff Report). There was no discussion at all of the evidence presented by the representative (the granddaughter of the architect) that the architect himself would not have thought preservation was appropriate, as he believed in the limited lifetime of structures and the



evolution of sites as times changed. She explained in some detail that the architect believed that certain buildings were appropriate for their time, but that sites should evolve as times change and new patterns of development replace older ones. The owner's representative also demonstrated, with supporting evidence, that re-use of the building as a theater would not be feasible physically or economically.

Most importantly, we believe that the Commission cannot, in fact, make the appropriate findings for the determination of significance as a landmark in the absence of a development proposal. The reason for this is that San Jose Municipal Code Section 13.48.110(H) requires that, in order to make such a finding, the Commission must determine that the designation as a landmark "conforms with the goals and policies of the general plan." Although we note that the staff report and the historical research report commissioned by the City both conclude that designation would conform with General Plan policies, their analysis only considers General Plan policies that relate to historic preservation.

The General Plan contains hundreds of policies. A specific subset of policies relate to historic preservation, but many more relate to development, jobs creation, the establishment of urban villages (of which this property is a part), the coordination of development with transportation, and many other issues. In the absence of a proposal for development (which may or may not involve re-use of this Building) it is not possible for the Commission to determine that in fact such designation conforms to the goals and policies of the General Plan as a whole.

In order to properly advise the Commission on this issue, planning staff would need to analyze the effect of the landmark designation on a proposed development, and how such designation would or would not conform to the goals and policies of the General Plan as a whole, not just the policies of the General Plan that encourage historic preservation.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that the Historic Landmarks Commission make no recommendation at this time, but instead consider the matter in light of a proposed development application when such application is filed.

Very truly yours,

FEDERAL REALTY INVESTMENT TRUST



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Jeffrey S. Berkes

Executive Vice President – Western Region

Cc: Rich Buikema  
Linda Callon, Esq.  
Michelle Bevis